

THE SUNDAY TIMES



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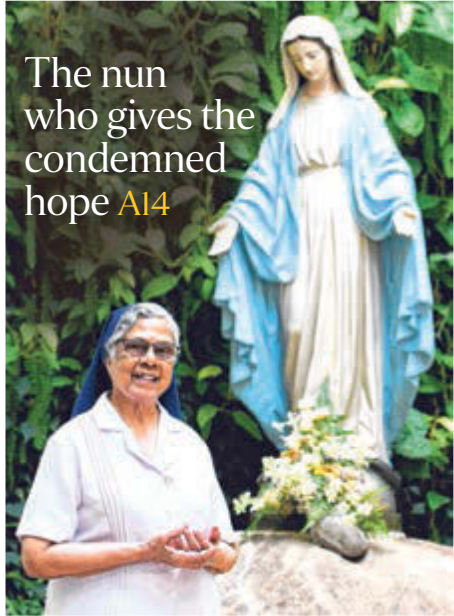
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S’pore-Malaysia meet pushed back after intrusion by Johor MB

Annual meeting on Iskandar untenable after Menteri Besar’s visit to vessel off Tuas: MFA

Shannon Teoh
Malaysia Bureau Chief
In Kuala Lumpur

An annual bilateral meeting between Singapore and Malaysia set for tomorrow has been postponed following the intrusion by Johor’s Menteri Besar into Singapore waters off Tuas.

Singapore’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said yesterday that Datuk Osman Sapian’s presence on a Malaysian vessel in Singapore’s terri-

tory on Wednesday had rendered the 14th Joint Ministerial Committee for Iskandar Malaysia (JMCIM) “untenable”.

“Singapore therefore proposed to postpone the JMCIM meeting, and Malaysia agreed,” the MFA spokesman said.

The committee was set up in 2007 to study how the two neighbours can work together in the South Johore economic zone of Iskandar.

The Malaysian delegation at this year’s meeting was supposed to have been led by Economic Affairs Minister Azmin Ali, Mr Osman and other Johor state leaders.

According to an official source who could not be named due to the sensitivity of the matter, Mr Os-

man’s presence on the vessel was not sanctioned by Malaysia’s federal government. “He was told not to do it, yet he went ahead anyway,” the source said.

Datuk Seri Azmin told reporters yesterday that the countries mutually agreed to postpone the JMCIM meeting as certain issues on the table were closely related to matters raised in a meeting between their foreign ministers last Tuesday.

“I do not want to interfere with the process by having the JMCIM meeting now. It’s a good idea to defer it,” he said.

Datuk Seri Azmin will instead have separately scheduled meetings with Singapore’s Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan and National Development Minister Lawrence Wong today and tomorrow.

Both countries had agreed last week to establish a working group to study the legal and operational issues relating to the maritime dispute, to provide a basis for further discussions and negotiations.

The dispute over maritime boundaries started after Kuala Lumpur, on Oct 25 last year, unilaterally extended the Johor Baru port limits such that they encroach on Singapore’s territorial waters off Tuas.

The new boundary line extends beyond what Malaysia had previously claimed as its own waters in a 1979 map, which Singapore has never accepted. Singapore on Dec 6 ex-

tended its own port limits in response, to cover the full extent of the Republic’s territorial waters.

Mr Osman on Wednesday night took to social media to share photos of him visiting the MV Pedoman which was anchored off Tuas, saying he received a briefing from Malaysian Marine Department officers regarding the border that is being disputed.

His Facebook post came a day after foreign ministers from both sides met in Singapore and agreed to form a working group to study and discuss the dispute over maritime boundaries.

Mr Osman has since denied that he was in Singapore waters, saying in a Facebook post on Friday that he was visiting personnel on duty to safeguard the boundary, and that the allegations were an attempt at obfuscation.

Relations between Singapore and Malaysia will be a key focus of discussion at the first Parliament sitting of the year tomorrow when Dr Balakrishnan delivers a ministerial statement.

Seven MPs and two Nominated MPs have also filed questions on the ongoing disputes over airspace and maritime boundaries, according to the agenda on the sitting issued by the Clerk of Parliament on Friday.

Masagos urges nation to aim for zero waste

Singapore has to relook the way it uses resources if it is to achieve its vision of becoming a zero-waste nation, said Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Masagos Zulkifli yesterday.

If done right, the country will also be able to create new economic opportunities for local businesses and jobs for Singaporeans, added Mr Masagos, who was speaking at the launch of Singapore’s Year Towards Zero Waste at Our Tampines Hub.

The year-long campaign aims to raise awareness of waste issues here and the need to treasure precious resources.

Besides a public consultation to contribute ideas to the inaugural Zero Waste masterplan, a #RecycleRight movement was also launched while a grant will be introduced to support relevant ground-up projects.

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CHRISTIE’S



Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat and his wife, National Heritage Board chief executive Chang Hwee Nee, watching a lion dance performance at the Chui Huay Lim Club yesterday. With them were (from left) Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan honorary secretary Woo Chee Chay, board member William Tay, vice-president Ang Chee Guan, lifetime honorary president George Quek and Chui Huay Lim Club president Teo Kiang Ang. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

S'pore can be global hub for bridging cultures: Heng

Singaporeans' multilingual ability puts them in very good position to build links, says minister

Ng Jun Sen
Business Correspondent

In the age of globalisation, the fact that two countries can speak the same language is a big advantage to

both, said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday.

Singaporeans' multilingual ability thus puts them in a very good position to build bridges with people and cultures around the world, he said.

He was speaking to members of the Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan, a clan association, at the Chui Huay Lim Club, where he launched a book chronicling the contributions of the Teochew community here.

"With globalisation, Singaporeans are more likely to gain an advantage in cross-border negotiations. At the same time, Singaporeans can further connect across different cultures. In this way, Singapore can

also become an international hub for bringing together cultures and blending ideas," Mr Heng said in Mandarin.

A member of the audience then asked how this could be done, during a panel discussion at the end of yesterday's event.

Responding, Mr Heng said Singapore should leverage all kinds of links, but at the same time, Singaporeans should be sensitive to the

interests of other nationalities and the relationship should be a win-win one for all parties. "Every culture will be slightly different, but if we are humble, respectful and make an effort to learn, then I think we have a very strong asset," he said.

In his speech, he also cited the uncertainties of the global economy due to the United States-China trade war, the unclear prospect of Brexit, as well as the volatile financial markets today.

Asked about this grim economic outlook, Mr Heng explained that trade protectionism is the result of a reaction against globalisation in the past decade, as some people feel they have not benefited from it.

"The particular problem of trade is that the benefits are spread very widely, but the costs are focused on a few," he said.

Americans, for example, gained from lower prices of imported goods from China, but the reliance on trade had led to some workers being displaced in certain US states.

Mr Heng said Singapore's direction is to help companies transform amid the intense competition and rapid technological advances faced by various industries. "Equally important is that we must also help our people, our workers to learn new skills, do new jobs, so that we can all benefit from (globalisation)," he said.

He also urged clan associations, as well as trade associations and chambers, to strengthen regional and international contacts, with the goal of creating more business opportunities for Singaporeans.

Singapore can also learn more from its Teochew community's entrepreneurial spirit and social contributions, he added.

At the event, Mr Heng launched the English edition of the book, *The Story Of Singapore Teochews*, a 448-page compilation of stories of the community put together by project director Lim Kim Huat, a former executive editor of Chinese daily *Lianhe Zaobao*.

The book, which first came out in Chinese last September, is a chronicle of the Teochew community's contributions to the country since its pre-independence days, and features 80 influential Teochew Singaporeans.

An electronic version of the book – available in both English and Chinese – was also released yesterday.

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GAINING AN EDGE

With globalisation, Singaporeans are more likely to gain an advantage in cross-border negotiations. At the same time, Singaporeans can further connect across different cultures. In this way, Singapore can also become an international hub for bringing together cultures and blending ideas.

”

FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEE KEAT, speaking in Mandarin.

STRENGTH IN HUMILITY

Every culture will be slightly different, but if we are humble, respectful and make an effort to learn, then I think we have a very strong asset.

”

MR HENG

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A Gojek advertisement at Orchard MRT station. While the Gojek beta app offered only rides beginning and ending in the eastern and south-central parts of Singapore initially, it has since gone nationwide. Users say its lower fares are the main attraction, although it is unclear how long the financial incentives for passengers and drivers will last. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Gojek’s lower fares, driver perks prove to be big draw

ST check finds its rides slightly cheaper than Grab’s without surge pricing as rivalry heats up

Toh Ting Wei and Fabian Koh

Customer service agent Joena Shivan used to commute using Grab cars between her Tampines home and her workplace in Little India. But since Gojek’s arrival in late November, its lower prices have drawn the 41-year-old, who has saved about \$240 in the six weeks since she made the switch. While the Gojek beta app offered only rides beginning and ending in the eastern and south-central parts of Singapore initially, it has since gone nationwide – from Jan 2. Its lower fares are the main attraction, said users. Public relations consultant Gayle Lim, 23, who saves about \$2 on every trip she takes with Gojek, said: “It’s not much by itself, but a few dollars here and there really add up, especially if you are taking these cars very often because of work.” A check by The Sunday Times on prices at different times over three days found that Gojek’s fares were slightly lower than Grab’s when surge pricing was not in effect. Some commuters said while Grab’s other options GrabShare and GrabHitch are cheaper, there are downsides. Undergraduate Mitchell Tan, 24, said: “I take cabs only when I need to go somewhere urgently, but the advance booking (feature) for GrabHitch does not allow that.” Despite the lower fares, private-hire drivers whom The Sunday Times spoke to said they have seen their earnings rise by between 15 and 40 per cent after switching to Gojek, due to the incentives offered. Gojek operates a point-based incentive system that awards drivers

a cash bonus for every milestone they reach in a day. Non-peak-hour and peak-hour trips are one point and 1.5 points respectively. Incentives are divided into five tiers, with the highest requiring 30 points to earn a \$310 bonus. In contrast, Grab’s incentive system is based on the number of trips completed in a week and benchmarks vary based on what milestones they had previously reached, noted drivers who have previously worked for Grab. Ms Debbie Ong, 50, said the daily incentive system is less stressful for drivers. She has worked as a private-hire driver for almost three years. In an average eight-hour workday, she could pocket net earnings of around \$200, about 40 per cent more than what she would earn with Grab. She said: “I get to decide if I can rest once I hit my targets for the day. I don’t have to worry about whether I can reach the trips required for the rest of the week.” Despite Gojek’s presence, Grab remains bullish about its prospects. Mr Lim Kell Jay, head of Grab Singapore, told The Sunday Times that its operations have been unaffected by Gojek’s expansion. He said: “Drivers and passengers continue to choose Grab as we continue to focus on their needs and look at ways to bring more long-term value to them.” Grab had been rolling out improvements in the last few months even before Gojek’s entry, amid rumours of the Indonesian firm’s arrival. It introduced a programme in October that gives drivers a guaranteed fare level should they meet preset benchmarks in terms of trips completed and time spent online

Fare comparison

While anecdotal evidence from passengers indicated that Gojek rides were generally cheaper, a check by The Sunday Times on the fares of the three major players here indicates that the price difference between Grab and Gojek varies at different times.

| Lowest fare | 8AM Northpoint City to Republic Plaza | 5PM Northpoint City to Republic Plaza | 7PM Republic Plaza to Northpoint City | 1AM The Central to Northpoint City |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Jan 9 | | | | Jan 10 |
| Gojek | 19.40 | 17.40 | 37 | 28.90 |
| Grab | 25 | 19 | 29 | 26 |
| ComfortDelGro | 29.50 | 22 | 37 | 23.50 |
| Jan 10 | | | | Jan 11 |
| Gojek | 22.20 | 17.30 | 37 | 29.40 |
| Grab | 25 | 19 | 28 | 28 |
| ComfortDelGro | 30.50 | 21 | 37.50 | 23.50 |
| Jan 11 | | | | Jan 12 |
| Gojek | 23.90 | 19.90 | 37 | 35.20 |
| Grab | 24 | 20 | 62 | 28 |
| ComfortDelGro | 29 | 21 | 37.50 | 26.50 |

NOTE: All figures in S\$. Non-POSb/ DBS members could register with Gojek from 10am on Jan 10.

SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

SAVINGS ADD UP

It’s not much by itself, but a few dollars here and there really add up, especially if you are taking these cars very often because of work.



MS GAYLE LIM, a public relations consultant who saves about \$2 on every trip she takes with Gojek.

on the Grab app. Last Wednesday, the firm unveiled two subscription plans that Mr Lim said would give users more value. For example, a pass sold at \$109 lets users enjoy \$10 off 20 rides, which translates into savings of \$91 monthly. As a new player here, Gojek has had some hiccups. Drivers say the app loses to Grab in terms of matching them with nearby riders, and that waiting times in between trips are generally much longer due to a smaller pool of passengers. Glitches sometimes occur on the beta app, with drivers complaining of occasions when incentive payouts were delayed, or when the points they earned were inaccurately calculated. In addition, riders can cancel bookings but indicate that the drivers asked for it. This affects the drivers’ acceptance rate, and the issue has been flagged as a major problem by many drivers. Drivers who fall below an 85 per cent acceptance rating will not be eligible for their daily bonus. A Gojek spokesman said it constantly reviews its drivers’ incentive scheme to ensure it remains “fair and robust”, and added: “If driver-partners have questions about the app, they should get in touch directly with Gojek via our in-app help function or hotline. This will help us create the best user experience for them and riders.” As Gojek continues to expand its base, it is unclear how long the honeymoon of financial incentives for users and drivers will last. Ms Ong said: “They will definitely be lower in the future, as this is how businesses work.”

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Gradual roll-out hints at long-term goals, say experts

Indonesian ride-hailing firm Gojek’s measured entry into Singapore is symptomatic of the market conditions here and also hints at its long-term strategy, said transport experts. Unlike local players such as Ryde and Tada, Gojek has the depth and resources to be a serious contender to Grab, but “the era of expanding by just burning cash is going away”, noted Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) transport researcher Park Byung Joon. Gojek launched a beta version of its app here on Nov 29 last year with several restrictions. Only rides beginning and ending in the eastern and south-central parts of Singapore were available – services were extended islandwide only from Jan 2 – and access to the app was limited. The multi-function app firm – its services in Indonesia include food, massages and payment – has set aside US\$500 million (\$676 million) to expand in South-east Asia, going head to head with Grab. It is surprising that Gojek has not been more aggressive in its approach here, given that the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore (CCCS) “had essentially set aside 30 per cent of market share for the second guy, and right now there is probably no other company in competition”, noted Dr Park. Last September, the CCCS said that the merger between ride-hailing firms Grab and Uber had violated competition laws. It said the deal had resulted in Grab getting an 80 per cent share of the Republic’s ride-hailing market, up from 50 per cent previously. As a result, the commission set out directions aimed at easing the impact on both riders and drivers, and levelling the playing field for other competitors. One possible reason for Gojek’s slow roll-out is that it might be reviewing its initial business plan, and to get funding, it needs to demonstrate to investors how profitable it can potentially be, noted Dr Park. Driver and commuter recruitment on a large scale here is expensive, said SUSS transport economist Walter Theseira. “The drivers are hard to get, because they have to be lured away from Grab or taxi companies, with wage incentives.” While it remains possible that Gojek’s goal is to supplant Grab, another possibility could be to grow large enough that Grab looks to make a deal, he said. Or it could even be merely using ride-hailing as an entry point to build its other business lines. Based on the experiences of ride-hailing companies worldwide, it is a service that struggles to be profitable, he said. “The growth prospects now are in food delivery payments and other personal services. “Basically, they (Gojek) aren’t going to be able to deliver an interesting growth story with ride-hailing in the Singapore market, so I expect attention to turn to these other products soon.”

Fabian Koh
Toh Ting Wei

Man hurt after power bank blows up in pocket

Tee Zhuo

A man was taken to hospital on Friday evening after suffering burns from a power bank which had exploded in his pocket. The middle-aged man burned his palm when he reached into his pocket to remove the device at Bedok Interchange Hawker Centre, reported Chinese-language daily Lianhe Wanbao.

The Singapore Civil Defence Force said it responded to a call at about 6.40pm at Block 209 New Upper Changi Road. The injured man, who is in his 40s, was taken to Changi General Hospital. Ms Wendy Hong, 60, told The Sunday Times she was having dinner when she heard a commotion, with several diners standing around the injured man. “There was thick, grey smoke,

and I could also smell a very strong stench of burning chemicals,” said the part-timer who works in the clothing industry. Passers-by helped to put ice on the man’s hand, wrapping it up with plastic food wrap. “His face was screwed up – it was clear he was in a lot of pain,” added Ms Hong. Photographs given to Lianhe Wanbao show the badly burnt and melted remains of the power bank

on the hawker centre floor, as well as a large frayed hole in the man’s back pocket. Duck rice stall assistant Huang Jia Qiang, 47, told Lianhe Wanbao that he heard a small explosion, in addition to the smell of something burning. He said the man had been using his phone while eating, with the phone connected to the power bank in his pocket at the same time.




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Left: The power bank exploded and burned a hole in the man’s pocket. Right: The melted remains of the power bank. PHOTOS: LIANHE WANBAO



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Saudi teen who fled family granted asylum in Canada

BANGKOK • Canada has granted asylum to an 18-year-old Saudi runaway who feared death from her family if she were deported home from Thailand.

Thai officials said she had left "smiling and healthy" for a new life. The woman, Ms Rahaf Mohammed-al-Qunun, boarded a plane to Seoul, South Korea, late Friday evening and from there was scheduled to fly to Toronto, said the Thai immigration chief, Mr Surachate Hakpam, a police general.

He said Canada had given asylum to Ms Qunun, which was confirmed a few hours later by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada.

Mr Trudeau told reporters in Regina, Saskatchewan, that the United Nations refugee agency had asked the Canadian government to grant Ms Qunun asylum, "and we have accepted the UN's request". The events signalled a remarkable reversal in Ms Qunun's fortunes from less than a week ago when she barricaded herself in a Bangkok airport hotel room to avoid being sent back.

"She's lively, she's smiling and healthy," Mr Surachate told reporters at a late-night airport news conference. "She said that as soon as she arrives in Canada, one of the first things she wants to do is learn the language. She has determination."

She escaped from her family in Kuwait on Jan 5 and flew to Thailand. After being denied entry into the country, she rallied support on Twitter to avoid being deported, saying she feared her relatives might kill her if she were returned to them.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

The 48-hour stand-off at Suvarnabhumi Airport drew global attention through a social media campaign mounted by Ms Qunun from the hotel room, as well as by friends and supporters.

Her original destination had been Australia, where she hoped to join other women who fled Saudi Arabia, a patriarchal society where male family members can control even the smallest details of a woman's life.

Both Canada and Australia interviewed Ms Qunun as part of the refugee placement process, she said. The final decision on where to send her was up to the UN refugee agency, which granted her refugee status earlier last week.

But Mr Surachate said she preferred Canada over Australia for personal reasons. "She wishes to go to Canada," he said, "so we respect her wishes." Both Thailand and Canada were commended for their handling of the case by Mr Filippo Grandi, the top refugee official at the UN.

"Refugee protection today is of values that have prevailed."

VALUES HAVE PREVAILED

Refugee protection today is often under threat and cannot always be assured, but in this instance international refugee law and overriding values of humanity have prevailed.

UN REFUGEE OFFICIAL FILIPPO GRANDI.

TENSE CANADIAN-SAUDI TIES Canada's decision is likely to aggravate already tense relations with Saudi Arabia. In August, the kingdom expelled the Canadian ambassador to Riyadh, recalled the Saudi ambassador to Ottawa and froze all new trade and investment deals with Canada after Canada's Foreign Ministry posted two Twitter messages calling on Saudi Arabia to release imprisoned rights activists, including two who have family in Canada.

The kingdom also retaliated against Canada with a series of other measures that included suspending flights by Saudia, the national carrier, to the UN, and ordering the transfer of thousands of Saudi students studying in Canada elsewhere.

Ms Qunun's case received unusually quick consideration by the Thai authorities, the UN refugee agency, also known as UNHCR, and Canadian and Australian officials. Many asylum seekers wait years for placement in a country once they are accepted as refugees by the UN agency.

After Thai officials agreed last Monday to let Ms Qunun leave the airport, they were eager to have her case settled quickly so that she could depart for whatever country that agreed to accept her.

Complicating matters, her father and brother arrived in Bangkok last Tuesday. In Saudi Arabia, women are not allowed to travel without a male guardian. The father met immigration and refugee agency officials to make the case that Ms Qunun's father had denied abusing her.

"Her father said that his daughter might have felt neglected because



treatment and should be under his family's care.

Ms Qunun refused to see them. She said earlier in an interview that her brother had often beaten her, and that her family once locked her in a room for six months because she cut her hair in a way they didn't like. Mr Surachate met the father, whom he declined to name but identified as a provincial governor in Saudi Arabia. He told reporters that Ms Qunun's father had denied abusing her.

"Her father said that his daughter might have felt neglected because

he has 10 children," the immigration chief said. "Of course, it's normal that parents worry about their child. But since the daughter asked to be under the care of UNHCR, we have to respect her request."

Ms Qunun's father and brother asked to see her before her departure but she refused to meet them, Mr Surachate said. They also were scheduled to leave on Friday evening.

"This matter, therefore, ends for Thailand," he said. "This issue is not about international relations. This is about a family affair." NTIMES



(Far left) Ms Rahaf Mohammed-al-Qunun in the UNHCR building in Bangkok, and (left) being accompanied by Thai immigration chief Surachate Hakpam (behind her) and unidentified foreign officials to board a flight departing Suvarnabhumi Airport on Friday. PHOTOS: REUTERS, EPA-EFE

S'poreans need to relook way they use resources: Masagos

Year-long campaign to raise awareness of waste issues in push to become zero-waste nation

Calvin Yang

20%

Percentage that the domestic recycling rate has hovered around for the past few years.

The onus is, however, on Singaporeans to consciously act to treasure their resources and protect their environment, he added.

As part of Singapore's Year Towards Zero Waste this year, public consultations will be held to contribute to the inaugural Zero Waste Masterplan, which will highlight strategies that the Government will implement in the next few years.

One example is the introduction of the extended producer responsibility approach to managing e-waste by 2021, which would compel producers of electrical and electronic equipment here to ensure their products are collected and recycled or disposed of at the end of their lifespans.

The Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and the National Environment Agency will publish the masterplan in the second half of this year.

A #RecycleRight movement will also be launched to get Singaporeans to recycle correctly, such as by keeping recyclable items clean, dry and free from food contamination.

In addition, a grant will be introduced to support relevant ground-up projects. More details on this will be announced later.

The year-long campaign hopes to raise awareness of waste issues and the need to treasure resources.

"This requires a paradigm shift. We need to adopt a circular economy approach," said Mr Masagos, referring to the economic model which aims to reuse and recycle resources for as long as possible.

"Traditionally, we use resources in a linear fashion. But one aspect of

the circular economy is to turn trash into treasure by reusing and recycling our resources endlessly."

He cited how local fruit juice manufacturer, Australian Fruit Juice, has partnered upcycling solutions provider UghyGood to process waste fruit peels as ingredients for producing organic cleaning agents.

"In doing so, they turn trash into treasure, generating new economic value from something that would otherwise have been thrown away. They have also created new green jobs, as skilled workers would be required to perform the conversion process," he added.

"Each of us can contribute in our own way towards a zero-waste Singapore."

However, observers believe Singapore's highly urbanised environment and poor recycling habits are

stumbling blocks in its quest to be a zero-waste nation. The domestic recycling rate has hovered around 20 per cent for the past few years. Taiwan has a household recycling rate of 55 per cent in comparison.

The Semakau landfill, Singapore's only landfill, is projected to run out of space by 2035.

Ms Melissa Tan, chairman of the Waste Management and Recycling Association of Singapore, said there is still "a very long way to go".

"We must continue to work towards zero waste, lofty though the aim may be, simply because our little red dot does not have unlimited space for landfills," said Ms Tan, using the nickname for Singapore.

It is the first time Singapore has dedicated an entire year to supporting an environmental cause. Last year was designated as the Year of Climate Action. It saw over 800 climate action-related events here.

Calling the campaign a success, Mr Masagos said more than 340,000 individuals and organisations stepped forward and pledged to reduce their carbon footprint.

"That is a good start, but we must not stop there," he said. "Climate change will have a growing impact on our lives, more so for our children and much more for our grandchildren."

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Mr Arthur Huang, 40, chief executive officer and founder of Miniwiz, demonstrating a prototype of Miniwiz's Robin, a smart recycling station, to Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Masagos Zulkifli and Senior Minister of State for the Environment and Water Resources Amy Khor at Our Tampines Hub yesterday. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

Still some way to go to achieve zero-waste aim: Observers

Singapore still has some way to go before becoming a zero-waste nation, observers told The Sunday Times.

Yesterday, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Masagos Zulkifli launched the Year Towards Zero Waste to get Singaporeans to strive towards that vision. Highlights of the campaign include a movement to get Singaporeans to recycle in the right way and a grant to support relevant projects.

But environmental groups, academics and MPs cited challenges such as Singapore's highly urbanised society and its low domestic recycling rates. Many Singaporeans have yet to embrace the culture of reusing, reducing and recycling correctly, said Ms Melissa Tan, chairman of the Waste Management and Recycling Association of Singapore.

Even with a slew of measures to encourage people to recycle more, Singapore has fared poorly in recycling. It generated 7.7 million tonnes of

waste in 2017, enough to fill 15,000 Olympic-size swimming pools.

One example he cited was how Our Tampines Hub sends about 700kg of food waste – equivalent to 3,500 bowls of rice – to eco-digesters instead of waste bins daily.

The digesters convert the waste to water used for washing, and fertiliser, which is distributed to Tampines residents for their gardens. With no food waste to be collected, Our Tampines Hub's general waste collector comes only once a day, instead of four times, reducing transport costs and emissions.

Ms Pek Hai Lin, manager of non-profit group Zero Waste SG, believes continuous engagement with the public and private sectors is essential. She added that the Government can also encourage change by passing regulations that "enable various actors to move towards the direction of zero waste".

For consumers, it involves "switching from affluence to minimalism by changing our lifestyles".

Currently, not all products are reused or recycled sufficiently, he observed. "As a result, society as a whole pays a high price – financially, socially and environmentally – to deal with resource constraints and disposal of waste."

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Professor Rajasekhar Balasubramanian of the National University of Singapore's civil and environmental engineering department added: "We need to close the loop and build sustainable economies that recognise the value of natural resources through a circular economy."

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Calvin Yang

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Pahang Regent to ascend as Sultan, paving way to become Malaysia's king

Tengku Abdullah, to be sworn in as Sultan on Tuesday, will be next in line for national throne under rotation system

KUALA LUMPUR • The Regent of Pahang will ascend the state throne on Tuesday, the state palace announced yesterday, paving the way for him to become Malaysia's next king.

Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, 59, will be sworn in as the sixth Pahang Sultan at the Sultan Abu Bakar palace in Pekan, Pahang, said his younger brother and royal council member, Tengku Abdul Rahman Sultan Ahmad Shah yesterday.

The announcement came a day after the Pahang royal council met to discuss the succession, given the poor health of the incumbent ruler, 88-year-old Sultan Ahmad Shah.

The Sultan had been expected to abdicate in favour of his son Tengku Abdullah, who has been Regent for the past two years. This would put Tengku Abdullah in line to be the next Malaysian constitutional monarch under the rotation system practised by the country's nine royal houses.

An amendment was made to the Pahang Constitution to empower the royal council to endorse the Regent's ascension to the throne. The Star quoted the Regent's brother as saying at a special press conference yesterday.

"Pahang is facing an unusual challenge. My father is undergoing in-

tensive medical treatment," Tengku Abdul Rahman said at the press conference in Pekan.

"It is with sadness that my family and I accept the reality that my father can no longer shoulder the responsibility of being a ruler."

"My family and I proposed that our brother, the Regent of Pahang, be appointed his successor and the sixth Sultan of Pahang."

He said Tengku Abdullah had agreed to accept the responsibility. The succession issue arose last Sunday, when Kelantan's Sultan Muhammad V abdicated as King after serving just two years – three years short of the five-year reign – purportedly over his recent marriage to a Russian woman.

After the Pahang royal council meeting on Friday, chants of *Daulat Tuanku* (Long live the King) were heard three times from the Kuala Lumpur hotel room where the meeting took place, The Star reported yesterday.

When journalists asked Tengku Abdullah then if he would ascend the throne, he reportedly said: "Oh no, you must take one thing at a time." However, when a reporter congratulated the Regent, he politely said: "Thank you."

Tengku Abdullah and those present at the meeting then posed



Due to his poor health, Pahang's incumbent ruler Sultan Ahmad Shah had been expected to abdicate in favour of his son Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah (left). The Regent's younger brother, Tengku Abdul Rahman Sultan Ahmad Shah, is seen beside him. PHOTO: BERNAMA

for a photo. His wife, Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah Sultan Iskandar, 58, looked emotional and wiped her eyes a few times, reported The Star.

Tunku Azizah, who is a sister of the current Sultan of Johor, also hugged her in-laws who are part of

the royal council.

If Pahang declines to take up the throne, the next in line will be the Johor ruler, followed by Perak.

Malaysia's Conference of Rulers – comprising the nine state sultans and four governors of states with no royal families (Penang, Melaka, Sa-

bah, Sarawak) – will hold a special meeting on Jan 24 to elect the next king.

The Keeper of the Ruler's Seal at the national palace, Syed Danial Syed Ahmad, has said that the next Malaysian king will take his oath of office on Jan 31.

A king in the making

Up until just a week ago, Pahang Regent Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah was probably more known to the average Malaysian as the face of the national football association, which he helmed for four years until 2017.

Now however, he stands to be the country's next King, as he is set to succeed his father to become the sixth Sultan of Pahang on Tuesday.

It is a role he has been primed to fill since he stepped into his father's shoes nearly 40 years ago in 1979 to rule Pahang state as Regent while Sultan Ahmad Shah took his turn at the throne as Malaysia's seventh King for five years under the rotation system practised by the nation's nine royal houses.

He was only 20 years old then, but his years of study and training in the United Kingdom – including at Britain's prestigious royal military academy Sandhurst in 1980, followed by a foreign affairs and diplomacy course in Oxford a year later – would stand him in good stead.

He took on the mantle again as the Pahang Regent two years ago, when the Sultan, now 88 years old, fell gravely ill.

The fourth of eight siblings and the eldest son, Tengku Abdullah was born on July 30, 1959, in the royal town of Pekan to Sultan Ahmad Shah and the late Tengku Afzan Tengku Muhammad.

He first attended primary school



Pahang Regent Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah and his wife, Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah Sultan Iskandar, at the Pahang Royal Council Meeting in Kuala Lumpur on Friday. PHOTO: BERNAMA

locally, then went on to study at St Thomas' primary and secondary schools in the state capital Kuantan. He then left for England, attending Aldenham School in Hertfordshire.

A keen sportsman from a young age, Tengku Abdullah played football, hockey and sepak takraw. He performed well enough at football to represent his state.

His sporting interest would lead him to head several national bodies, including the Football Association of Malaysia, the Malaysian Hockey Confederation and the Royal Malaysian Polo Association.

In 1986, Tengku Abdullah married another royal, Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah Sultan Iskandar, a sister of the current Sultan of Johor.

Tengku Abdullah has nine children – four sons and five daughters. While the Regent is known nationally as a patron of the sports, he is a more familiar face in his home state where he spent his formative years accompanying his father on visits to subjects in need, a practice he continues today.

Even as excitement mounted over his upcoming ascension to the throne, the Regent and his wife took time to grace a local wedding yesterday afternoon.

According to Utusan Malaysia, the wedding in Temerloh town was that of the son of Datuk Mohd Musa Noor Mohd, president of the Malaysian Athletics Coaches Association.

Lim Ai Leen



NEED FOR SUCCESSOR

Pahang is facing an unusual challenge. My father is undergoing intensive medical treatment. It is with sadness that my family and I accept the reality that my father can no longer shoulder the responsibility of being a ruler. My family and I proposed that our brother, the Regent of Pahang, be appointed his successor and the sixth Sultan of Pahang.



TENGGU ABDUL RAHMAN SULTAN AHMAD SHAH, at the press conference in Pekan, on his father, Sultan Ahmad Shah (above), and brother Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah.

Kelantan residents stunned by Sultan's shock resignation

Hazlin Hassan

Malaysia Correspondent
In Kota Baru (Kelantan)

At a glance, the green-domed yellow mosque in the capital of the Malay-majority state of Kelantan looks like any modest and unassuming mosque in Malaysia.

But the Sultan Muhammad II Mosque, also known as Telipot Mosque, is connected to one of the six palaces of its state ruler, Sultan Muhammad V, who was the Malaysian King for two years until Jan 6, in more than one way. As it is just a few metres away from Istana Telipot and is frequented by the Sultan, he had requested for speakers to be installed in the palace so he could hear the mosque's call to prayer and religious sermons.

The 49-year-old ruler is often seen in a simple jubah or long robe, and a skullcap when in public, a sharp contrast to the regalia that royals wear in official photographs or at ceremonies.

In an agrarian state nicknamed Serambi Makkah or Mecca's Verandah, where 94 per cent of the population of 1.85 million are Malay Muslims and the men favour robes, the Sultan fits in well, with his jubah and long beard.

In random street interviews by The Sunday Times, the Sultan certainly seems well-liked by his people.

"He is loved by the people because he is a very friendly and Islamic ruler," said public servant Din Hassan, 58, from the rural district of Jeli.

Retiree Mohd Rosli Zainal, 60, who regularly prays at the Telipot Mosque, said the Sultan was "a nice man who always comes to the mosque to pray".

"He would come in, meet the people, and salam (shake hands)." Born in 1969, Sultan Muhammad attended primary school in Kelantan before transferring to Alice Smith School, an international school, in Kuala Lumpur.

He went on to further his education in diplomatic studies and Islamic studies at St Cross College, Oxford, and the Oxford Centre for Islamic



WELL-LIKED BY HIS PEOPLE

He is known to be very down-to-earth and simple. He is very close to the people.



MOHD HAKIM ABDULLAH, a GrabCar driver.



RESPECT FOR HIS DECISION

It is his right and the best choice for him.



NORALAM MAJID, a social activist.

NO NEED TO RESIGN

Why did he have to marry a foreigner? But it's up to him. He didn't have to resign like that.



MADAM NING ABDULLAH, who sells fish crackers.



TOP: Sultan Muhammad V attending prayers at Masjid Al Sultan Ismail Petra in Kelantan. He is often seen in a jubah and mingles easily with the people. ABOVE: The Sultan Muhammad II Mosque is a few metres away from Istana Telipot and is frequented by the ruler. PHOTOS: BERNAMA, HAZLIN HASSAN

caught the news on social media.

GrabCar driver Mohd Hakim Abdullah, 32, has heard the pregnancy talk and thought that it was right for the Sultan to step down in order to "avoid controversy". But he added that it was the Sultan's prerogative to marry. "He is known to be very down-to-earth and simple. He is very close to the people. I have seen him at the mosque, and at several events," he said, adding that the Sultan leads a Walk With Me walkathon, during which he mingles with participants.

In a state often inundated by floods during the monsoon season, the Sultan is also often seen helping the victims, sometimes in remote areas of Kelantan. Mr Mohd Hakim said: "I thought he resigned due to political interference."

Sultan Muhammad does not have good relations with Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. There was talk that the Sultan had delayed Tun Dr Mahathir's swearing-in as Premier following Pakatan Harapan's (PH) victory in the general elections in May last year, although this was denied by the palace in a statement.

In February last year, the Kelantan palace revoked a title given to Dr Mahathir by the Sultan's father, Sultan Ismail Petra. No reason was given but the move was seen as a sign that Sultan Muhammad did not support the PH coalition.

Dr Mahathir has often clashed with royal rulers, with two constitutional crises involving the sultans in 1983 and 1993.

Now that Sultan Muhammad is back in Kelantan, which has been ruled by the opposition fundamentalist Parti Islam Se-Malaysia since 1990, it is unlikely that he will help the PH government win support in the state where it had failed to win any seats in the last election.

While the Sultan does have a positive image among the locals in Kelantan, people generally do not publicly criticise the royal family. Even though there are no lese majeste laws, the government has recently arrested three men for allegedly insulting the former King on social media.

In Malaysia, there are nine royal

families, and their respective Sultans take turns to become Malaysia's Supreme Ruler, otherwise known as the King or Agong. Sultan Muhammad ascended to the post in December 2016, six years after he became the ruler of Kelantan. His appointment as Sultan in 2010 was challenged by his own father, who had suffered a stroke and was deemed unfit to rule by Kelantan's Council of Succession. Sultan Ismail's lawyers filed a petition against his son's appointment but lost.

Despite the controversy, many in Kelantan feel that Sultan Muhammad is the rightful heir.

Housewife Madam Kira Mohamad, 53, from the seaside district of Bachok, said that while it was "right for him to step down as Agong because he kept the marriage a secret and even the Prime Minister did not know about it", he could still continue as the state ruler as he is the eldest son.

Social activist Noralam Majid, 60, from Pasir Mas district, said that people in Kelantan were not saddened by the resignation. "It is his right and the best choice for him. The people still look up to and will uphold the Sultan for the sake of the country and Islam. There are no demonstrations in Kelantan protesting against his resignation."

Others were more critical. Freelance IT consultant Azmin Muhammad, a Kota Bharu native working in London, disapproved of the Sultan keeping quiet on his reported marriage.

"Given his performance, he is definitely not fit to reign. I don't mind him being an absentee king. His younger brother, who has a PhD, was acting Sultan. Let him continue," he said, referring to Tengku Muhammad Fa-iz Petra.

"(Sultan Muhammad) has let his personal interests intervene in his constitutional duties," Mr Azmin said, pointing to the delay in swearing in Dr Mahathir as prime minister and the appointment of Mr Tommy Thomas as Attorney-General, who many quarters had opposed because he was not Malay.

"He knows people will object to his Russian wife but previous kings had (foreign) wives, no problem. But to ghost just like that, as head of state, is unthinkable."

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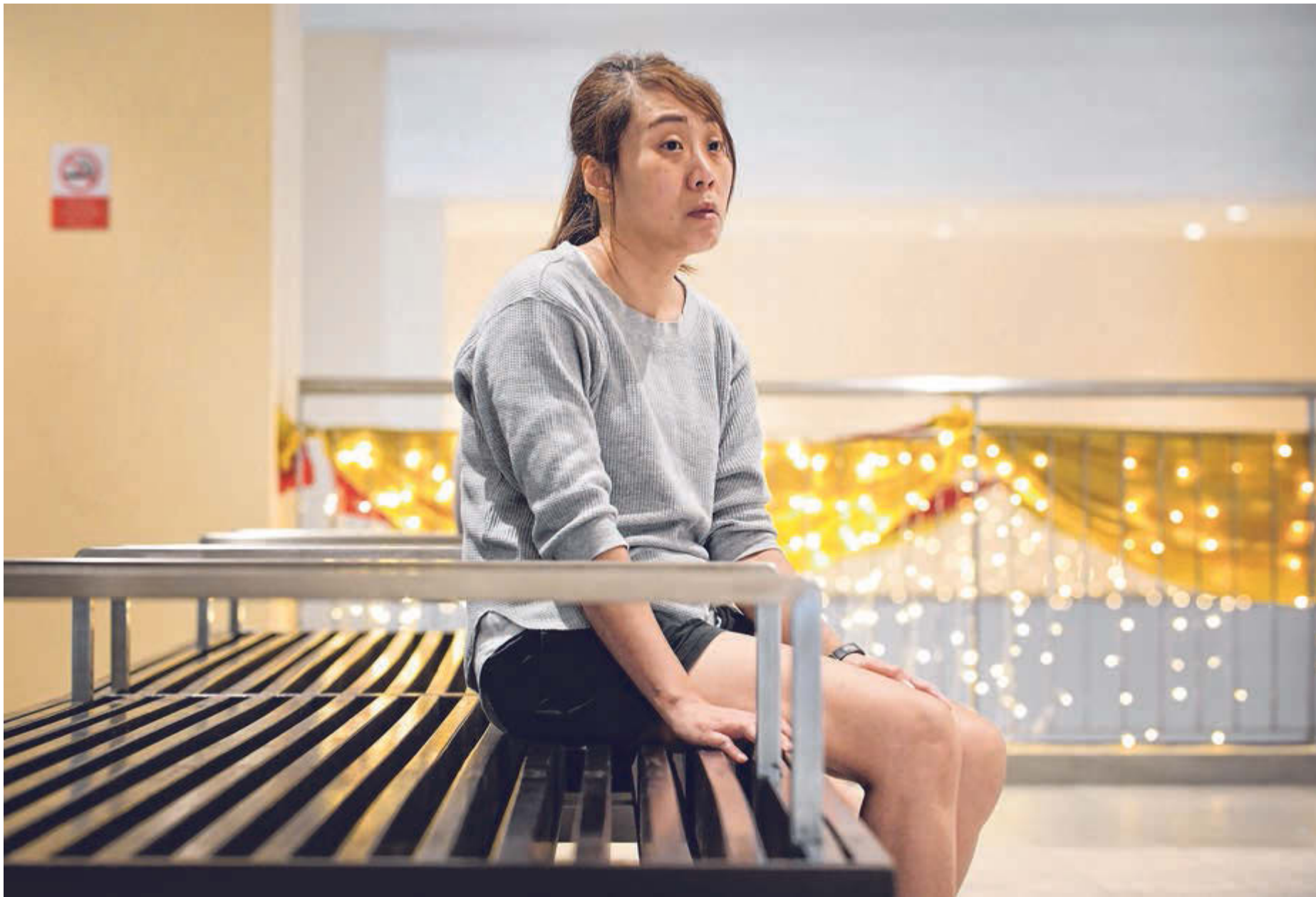
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Ms Koh Soh Kuan is hopeful that she can still go ahead with the Jan 21 registration of her marriage to Mr Pang Ming Kwong, who died on Dec 28. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

His final gift of love

Koh Soh Kuan, whose hospital bedside engagement party touched many, tells Social Affairs Correspondent Janice Tai about her unusual love story

He was 50 and she 41 when they first went steady. She was drawn to his hardworking and down-to-earth nature, he to her simple heart and willingness to listen.

The nature of their dates also reflected a simple love: meals, movies and jogs along East Coast Beach.

Ms Koh Soh Kuan broached the subject of settling down several times during their eight years together, but Mr Pang Ming Kwong was a career-minded man who was not keen to get married.

"He kept telling me that many marriages ended up in divorces and I was disappointed, but I knew marriage cannot be forced," said Ms Koh, who stuck with him even when he was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer two years ago and doctors said he had only a few years to live.

On Nov 17 last year, however, he held her hand beside his hospital bed and declared: "I love you, will you marry me?"

Ms Koh, 49, said yes even though Mr Pang, 58, was by then very frail from battling cancer.

A month later, on Dec 15, they exchanged engagement rings in front of about 50 guests and staff at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. Their story was widely shared on social media and touched many people.

But on Dec 28 last year, Mr Pang died before they could tie the knot. A date at the Registry of Marriage had already been booked for Jan 21.

In an exclusive interview at a fast-food eatery near her home in Bedok, a tearful Ms Koh opened up to The Sunday Times about the man she loves.

They met in 2011 at a tea appreciation class. Participants exchanged contact numbers freely and Ms Koh gave Mr Pang her number when he approached her.

He called the next day, stammering over the phone, and immediately asked her out. She found him sincere and agreed to meet him.

Their first date in 2011 was at a cafe in Pan Pacific Hotel and they talked about work. He was an auditor in an international certification firm and she, an executive in a reinsurance company.

A year later, they confessed their feelings for each other. It was her first relationship while he had one previous girlfriend.

While she was disappointed that he was not keen on marriage, she accepted it and stayed with him.

In 2016, Mr Pang told her that he was found to have stage 4 lung can-



Above: Ms Koh and Mr Pang getting engaged on Dec 15 at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. PHOTO: MOUNT ELIZABETH HOSPITAL

Left: The couple in a photo taken on a 2015 China trip with friends. PHOTO: COURTESY OF KOH SOH KUAN

LOVE IS TIMELESS

I did not think about the brevity of time left when he proposed. It did not matter, whether it is a day, a week or a month, because we loved each other. Love shouldn't be defined by time or what you get from each other.



MS KOH SOH KUAN

cer during a health check-up. Both were devastated but tried to continue living life as usual, going out for meals and exercise.

Whenever Mr Pang was hospitalised and had no appetite, she would coax him to eat by asking him what he wished to do in the future. He said he would like to go to concerts and travel overseas with her.

"If you are with me, I think I can live for a few more years," Mr Pang often told Ms Koh.

Ms Koh, a Buddhist, was hoping for a miracle – that he would be saved; Mr Pang, a Christian, would also pray every night.

On Nov 9, when he was hospitalised for the third – and final time,

he started calling her "my dear wife" when she visited him every day.

"I was very touched because he often said in the past, he is not like youngsters who know how to sweet-talk, or give flowers and gifts. Hearing him call me that was very valuable to me," said Ms Koh.

From then, the couple began holding hands at his bed every day. She told him interlocking their fingers would symbolise being husband and wife forever and he smiled and nodded his head in happiness.

On Nov 17, he asked her to sit down next to him. He sounded so serious she was worried that he would tell her that his condition worsened.

Instead, he told her she has changed him and he finally knew what love was. Then, he asked her to marry him.

"I was very surprised and happy," said Ms Koh, who added that she had no idea what made him change his mind about marriage.

"I did not think about the brevity of time left when he proposed. It did not matter, whether it is a day, a week or a month, because we loved each other. Love shouldn't be defined by time or what you get from each other," she added.

But her 73-year-old mother, who has mild dementia, urged them to get married only after he got better. Ms Koh did not discuss this much with Mr Pang as she did not want to stress him further. She just reassured her mother that he would get better.

A day after the proposal, Mr Pang was transferred to the intensive care unit for severe breathing difficulties. In total, he had undergone five rounds of chemotherapy and could not speak without the assistance of a speaking valve.

On their engagement day, Ms Koh wore a white dress and he donned a white T-shirt. While the nurses sang A Thousand Years from the Twilight movie, tears streamed down Ms Koh's face.

It meant a lot to her that Mr Pang went to such lengths to recognise her as his fiancée. She realised it could be his way of showing his final gift of love to her.

He died at 1.21am on Dec 28, with Ms Koh and family and friends by his bedside.

Even till the very end when the doctor was writing down his time of death, Ms Koh pleaded with him to save her fiancée.

On Jan 21, the day she is supposed to register her marriage with him, her friends are planning to have a picnic with her at East Coast Beach, in memory of Mr Pang. He loved the sun and nature.

Ms Koh, who is not open to dating other men from now on, still has one question on her mind.

"Can I still go and register my marriage with him on that day?" she asked desperately, not rhetorically.

"I miss him so much and I want us to be husband and wife forever."

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Drug kingpin El Chapo spied on his wife and mistress

NEW YORK • In the past few months, the 18 jurors at the drug conspiracy trial of Joaquin Guzman Loera, the Mexican kingpin known as El Chapo who is accused of running the world's biggest drug cartel, have been inundated with evidence exposing the innermost secrets of his narco-empire.

But last week, the panel got a riveting and unexpected look at something more revealing: Dozens of text messages Guzman sent to his wife and mistress. The private messages – obtained by the FBI with the help of an info-tech expert who worked for him – painted an astonishing portrait of the crime lord, not only as a serial philanderer but also as a man who, mixing sex and business, relied on the women in his life to help him conduct daily operations.

In one set of messages, Guzman and his wife Emma Coronel Aispuro cooed together over their twin baby daughters and then, in a flash, discussed whether his soldiers had been slaughtered in a gunfight. As page after page of these intimate notes – one describing how Coronel's enchiladas had made the kingpin fall in love with her – were displayed to the Brooklyn jury, Coronel sat in the room, stoic and silent, wearing a pair of black designer glasses.

A frequent presence at the trial, she displayed no emotion when an FBI agent read aloud a message in which Guzman told her about escaping a police raid at one of his safe houses by scrambling out the back. ("Oh love, that's horrible," she answered.)

There was also no response when the agent read a follow-up message in which Guzman asked her to send him moustache dye and to replace the underwear, shampoo and aftershave lotion he had left behind. The only thing more remarkable than the messages was how the FBI got hold of them.

FBI agent Stephen Marston told jurors the dramatic story of how the United States authorities launched a clandestine operation in 2010 to recruit Guzman's IT expert Christian Rodriguez to become an informant, go undercover and then spy on him.

Rodriguez had built Guzman and his allies an encrypted communication network, but then helped the bureau crack it. Mr Marston recounted that, at Guzman's request, Rodriguez had also installed spyware called FlexiSPY on Coronel's phone as well as on a phone Guzman had given to his mistress, Agustina Cabanillas Acosta.

After the IT specialist told the FBI about the spyware, agents obtained a search warrant for the messages, effectively using Guzman's lust and paranoia against him. Not even the Mafia boss John Gotti, whom the FBI secretly recorded for hours, had to endure the ordeal of his marital – and extramarital – missives being shown to the world.

In one of Guzman's messages, he ordered his wife to hide his weapons when he believed the police were at their door. In another, he joked about one of their infant daughters in a way that only a drug trafficker could. "Our Kiki is fearless," he wrote. "I'm going to give her an AK-47 so she can hang out with me."

The messages also showed how deeply Guzman's romantic partners were entangled in his work. "How are the sales going?" he wrote to Acosta in 2012. "Oh, like busy bees," she responded. "Non-stop, my love."

But Acosta (who, according to a photo, bore an uncanny resemblance to Guzman's wife) also appeared to be profoundly suspicious of the crime lord. Her own messages showed that she was all but certain Guzman was spying on her – as, of course, he was. She even complained about it to her friends.

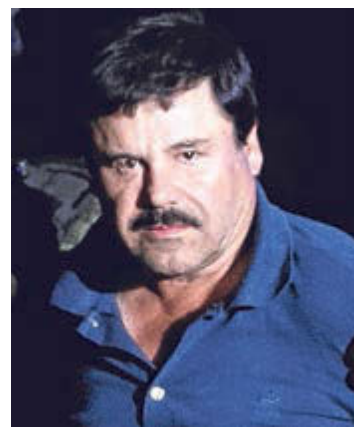
In one message, she told a friend that she did not trust the BlackBerry Guzman had given her because, as she put it, "the bastard can locate them". In another message, she seemed proud to have figured out her lover was a snoop. "I'm way smarter than him," she wrote.

After scores of messages were shown in court, Rodriguez was called to the witness stand. Baby-faced and wearing a blue suit, he told jurors that Guzman ultimately had him install the spyware on 50 different phones and was apparently obsessed with it.

Almost every day, Rodriguez said, the kingpin called him with questions about the software, which was linked to a computer where Guzman could view reports on the text messages and GPS locations generated by what he liked to call his "special phones".

Eventually, the reports became so voluminous, Rodriguez said, Guzman assigned one of his other technicians to read them and give him daily summaries.

At one point, Rodriguez told jurors, Guzman asked him to install a feature on the phones that allowed him to remotely – and secretly – activate their microphones. Then Guzman would play a little game, he said. He would call people who had the "special" phones and chat with them for a while then hang up, activate the microphone and listen to what they said about him. NYTIMES



FBI agents read the incriminating texts drug lord El Chapo sent to his wife Emma Coronel Aispuro. PHOTOS: REUTERS

Over the next several months, Rodriguez said he installed recording software in Guzman's network that automatically sent copies of the drug kingpin's calls to the FBI each day at midnight.

Govt shutdown now the longest in US history

Impasse that’s paralysed Washington enters 22nd day

WASHINGTON • The partial United States government shutdown entered a record 22nd day yesterday, as President Donald Trump remains steadfast in his demand for US\$5.7 billion (S\$7.7 billion) to build a Mexico border wall and Democrats in Congress are determined to refuse him the funds.

The impasse has paralysed Washington, with the President retaliating by refusing to sign off on budgets for swathes of government departments unrelated to the dispute. As a result, 800,000 federal employees as diverse as FBI agents, air traffic controllers and museum staff did not receive pay cheques on Friday.

The shutdown became the longest on record at midnight on Friday, when it overtook the 21-day stretch in 1995-1996, under Mr Bill Clinton.

Mr Trump on Friday however backed off on a series of previous threats to end the deadlock by declaring a national emergency and attempting to secure the funds without congressional approval.

“I’m not going to do it so fast,” he said at a White House meeting.

Mr Trump described an emergency declaration as the “easy way out” and said Congress had to step up to the responsibility of approving the US\$5.7 billion needed.

“If they can’t do it... I will declare a national emergency. I have the absolute right,” he said.

Until now, the President had suggested numerous times that he was getting closer to taking the controversial decision. But Mr Trump himself acknowledged in the White House meeting that an attempt to claim emergency powers would likely end up in legal battles going all the way to the Supreme Court.

Opponents say that a unilateral presidential move would be constitutional overreach and set a dangerous precedent in similar controversies.

The stand-off has turned into a test of political egos, particularly for Mr Trump, who came into office boasting of his deal-making powers and making an aggressive border policy the keystone of his nationalist agenda.

Democrats, meanwhile, seem determined at all costs to prevent a president who relishes campaign rally chants of “build the wall!” from getting a win.

Both Democrats and Republicans agree that the US-Mexican border presents major challenges, ranging from the violent Mexican drug trade to the plight of asylum seekers and poor migrants seeking new lives in the world’s richest country. There is also little debate that border walls are needed: about a third of the frontier is already fenced off.

But Mr Trump has turned his single-minded border wall push into a political crusade seen by opponents as a stunt to stoke xenophobia in his right-wing voter base, while wilfully ignoring the border’s complex realities.

For Mr Trump, who visited the Texas-Mexico border on Thursday, the situation amounts to an invasion by criminals that can only be solved by more border structures.

Separately, Puerto Rico’s governor urged Mr Trump to not redirect emergency funds destined to the island instead for the border wall. Mr Ricardo Rosello’s plea followed reports the White House has asked the Army Corps of Engineers to look into ways to divert funds destined for natural disaster relief for the wall.

“No wall should be funded on the pain and suffering of US citizens who have endured tragedy and loss through a natural disaster,” Mr Rosello tweeted on Friday. “Today it’s us, tomorrow it could be you.”

In September 2017, Hurricane Maria tore through the US territory in the Caribbean, killing some 3,000 people, causing catastrophic material damage and crippling the island’s power grid for months. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



800,000

Number of federal employees as diverse as FBI agents, air traffic controllers and museum staff who did not receive pay cheques on Friday as a result of the partial US government shutdown.

Department of Agriculture workers in St Louis protesting against the partial government shutdown on Wednesday. PHOTO: NYTIMES

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NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL
SINGAPORE

2 initiatives launched to help fight fake news, terrorism

Seminar module, security advisory booklet targeted at religious and community groups



Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu said yesterday: "In combating online falsehoods, we want to equip our community leaders with the ability to first detect and identify them, and then to have a response, which has to be very timely and effective. You have to build it (the response) before any incidents happen."

Venessa Lee

Two new initiatives have been launched to help religious and community groups fight fake news and terrorism.

One is a seminar module that helps them understand what fake news is and how it could impact security and society. The other is a security advisory booklet that will help them prepare their response plans for emergencies. The initiatives were announced by Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu yesterday at the Counter-Terrorism Seminar for Buddhist and Taoist Temples.

Ms Fu told reporters: "The threat to national security is ever present and we find that besides terrorist attacks, online falsehoods have also become a possible avenue."

While Singapore enjoys racial and religious harmony, race and religion are an "easy target" for creating fault lines, she cautioned. "We're affected by events that are happening outside (of Singapore)... So we must always have the resilience in society to help us combat such influences," she said.

"In combating online falsehoods, we want to equip our community leaders with the ability to first detect and identify them, and then to have a response, which has to be very timely and effective. You have to build it (the response) before any incidents happen."

The module, titled Combating Fake News, is spearheaded by the National Library Board, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY). One of the things taught is that humorous parodies and reports that one does not agree with do not constitute fake news.

The module, which was presented yesterday, will be included in future counter-terrorism seminars by the Singapore Police Force and MCCY.

The security advisory booklet includes advice on how to prepare a contingency response plan and planning guidelines for specific terror scenarios, such as the use of a vehicle as a weapon or the release of a chemical agent. Written in four languages, it was done by MCCY, the police and the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles.

"Places of worship are often soft targets because they are where people congregate," Ms Fu said. "This booklet is comprehensive (and will) help religious leaders better plan for emergencies."

Religious leaders at the seminar welcomed the new initiatives.

On the fake news module, Venerable Seck Kwang Phing, president of the Singapore Buddhist Federation, said: "It tells people not to blindly trust what is online when it comes to religion. When in doubt, go directly to the religious leaders."

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Bikers gather to show love for old motorcycles



A group of 60 motorcyclists getting ready to begin their ride from a carpark at Orto, a leisure park near Sembawang, to the Wicked Wallop IV bike show in Kranji. The convoy consists largely of older motorcycles registered before July 1, 2003, which are deemed to be more pollutive and are slated to be taken off Singapore's roads under the National Environment Agency's cash-for-deregistration scheme. The organiser of the ride told The Sunday Times the purpose of the gathering was to bring the affected bikers together and enjoy whatever time they have left with their machines. An online petition in support of these two-wheelers, called Save Singapore's pre-July 2003 motorcycles, has garnered about 8,000 signatures as of last night. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

Libraries also places where people can learn skills and share: Iswaran

Calvin Yang

Besides being places where people read and borrow books, public libraries can also be places where people gather to learn and share.

Library visitors can join programmes, pick up skills and even share their experiences with others.

This is an example of how libraries can stay relevant to the changing needs of Singaporeans, Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran said yesterday at the official opening of the library@harbourfront in VivoCity.

He said that over the next year, library@harbourfront, for instance, is expected to have more than 500 programmes, which will help participants learn new skills, including skills for the digital economy.

The National Library Board (NLB) is also broadening its channels to reach out to an increasingly digitalised society, through the use of features such as an NLB mobile app.

Efforts have also been made to bring the libraries closer to the people, whether in a shopping mall or integrated with community facilities or community centres.

"The idea is to bring our libraries closer to our people, so it is easier to spread the joy of reading, and enjoy learning together," said Mr Iswaran. Such efforts have led to in-



People queuing to enter the new library@harbourfront, which was officially opened yesterday in VivoCity mall. Spanning 3,000 sq m, it is the biggest of 13 libraries located in a mall here. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

creased visitorship, for instance, at Tampines Regional Library, which has seen a growth of almost 400,000 visitors a year after the library's revamp and relocation to Our Tampines Hub. This trend is also being seen in the libraries in Sengkang, Bedok and Yishun, which are in malls, or community spaces alongside community clubs, sports facilities and polyclinics.

The new library@harbourfront, the 26th public library here, offers sweeping views of Sentosa. Spanning 3,000 sq m, it is the biggest of 13 libraries located in a mall here.

It has a strong focus on digital technologies – its children's section

SHARED EXPERIENCE

It is not about having a space with just books or lounges and so on. It is about students, children, parents, grandparents, coming together to enjoy the facilities, and having a shared experience in reading and learning.



MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION S. ISWARAN, on how libraries are about the people who use them.

has a space for young readers to tinker with technology, and there are six learning pods for adults to access digital content and resources to upgrade their skills.

Mr Iswaran said libraries are about the people who use them.

"It is not about having a space with just books or lounges and so on," he said. "It is about students, children, parents, grandparents, coming together to enjoy the facilities, and having a shared experience in reading and learning."

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Fun day out for kids from ST Fund



It was time to get a “pizza” the action for eight-year-old Ahmad Daniyal Koh and JobStreet.com Singapore marketing manager Frieda Chan yesterday.

Ms Chan and Daniyal were stretching and limbering up before tackling one of life's more enjoyable pursuits – making a tasty pizza.

Daniyal was one of 15 primary school kids who took part in a pizza-making workshop at the PastaMania outlet at Singapore Management University.

They also learnt about food safety and kitchen hygiene, as well as the history of pizza.

The event was organised by JobStreet.com Singapore as part of the online employment portal's annual corporate social responsibility activities.

The children are beneficiaries of The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund, which provides financial assistance to help children from low-income families through school. ST PHOTOS: TIMOTHY DAVID

New skills framework to help social service workers plan careers

Need for such professionals to be ready to handle growing challenges in sector: Sam Tan

Ng Jun Sen
Business Correspondent

More will be expected of social service professionals as Singapore faces an ageing population in the years to come.

They will need to remain nimble and relevant, collaborate across silos and be equipped with the skills and knowledge to handle growing challenges in the social service sector, said Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sam Tan.

To this end, a new skills framework for social service was launched yesterday to help more than 15,000 of these professionals plan their career and development pathways.

The framework will provide information on the industry and type of skills and competencies needed for 60 job roles in five career tracks – social work, youth work, psychology, early intervention teaching, as well as care and programme.

The framework also highlights emerging trends in the sector, such as the use of data and research to help social service professionals in their work.

Said Mr Tan: "As individuals and families face increasingly complex social, economic and health issues, brought on by an ageing population and other demographic changes, the demand for social services will increase. In turn, expectations placed on our social service professionals will also increase."

He said the frameworks will help individuals and employers in identifying the key skills and competencies needed and be well-equipped to help those in need.

At its launch, the framework comprises 73 technical and 18 generic competencies, including research and data-analysis skills, and training courses on helping professionals collaborate with people in other disciplines and sectors.

Such interdisciplinary skills, which were not taught to industry

professionals in the past, are increasingly important, said Rainbow Centre executive director Tan Sze Wee, who also urged professionals to pick up the new skills in the framework.

"As a social worker today, I often need to consult and collaborate with other professionals like therapists and counsellors. We cannot just train social workers to know only their skills, but those of other professionals in the workplace as well, so the framework reflects the challenges of the sector," she said.

Ms Madhavi Manickavasagam, a psychologist at social service organisation Sun-Dac who works



HIGHER EXPECTATIONS

As individuals and families face increasingly complex social, economic and health issues, brought on by an ageing population and other demographic changes, the demand for social services will increase. In turn, expectations placed on our social service professionals will also increase.

MINISTER OF STATE FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT SAM TAN, on the emerging trends in the sector.

with caregivers and persons with disabilities, said an entire team of varied professionals work together in a single case, instead of the old days when only one social worker is primarily involved with the case.

"There is a lot of cross-support required, so, while the case worker may be the main contact, therapists and other allied professionals can also come in to work with the families to manage too. Because we work hand-in-hand, training becomes relevant as we need to share what we learnt with each other and see how we can improve our services," she said.

Besides individuals, Mr Tan said organisations will be able to attract talent, develop staff and plan for succession with the help of the skills map and career pathways in the framework. Training providers, too, can refer to the framework to design relevant training programmes for the sector.

There are more than 450 social service organisations in Singapore today.

Mr Tan was speaking at the Social Service Institute's graduation and awards ceremony for 219 graduates, mid-career professionals and industry experts, held at MES Theatre at Mediacorp.

Mr Muhammad Jamaluddin Mustafa, 31, who joined the social service sector after working as a security officer for seven years, delivered the valedictorian speech.

Now a senior social work assistant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, he said he was motivated to join the industry after hearing about the issues faced by elderly colleagues at his security job.

Mr Jamaluddin studied for his diploma in social service at the Social Service Institute last year, a hectic year in which he also got married and moved into his new Housing Board flat.

"I was never a bright student to begin with, so I had to study hard. To my wife, I'm sorry for all the holidays and weekends spent studying at home instead of going on dates, and thank you for helping to plan the wedding," he said.

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[illegible]

DEATH ROW'S ANGEL OF HOPE

Short film on nun who counselled inmates facing gallows sheds new light on last days of two 'holy wives' in Adrian Lim child murders

Janice Tai

A painful moment comes midway through Chai Yee Wei's new short film, *Sister*, when the sister of a murder victim confronts the nun who has been counselling the murderer's accomplices.

"Why do you have to do this? Why do you have to counsel someone who has done so much evil?" Margaret Ng, then in her late teens, pleads with Sister Gerard Fernandez. "How could you help them?"

Her sister, Agnes, was nine when she and another child, Ghazali Marzuki, 10, were murdered in a ritual killing in a Toa Payoh flat in 1981.

Temple medium Adrian Lim and his two "holy wives", Catherine Tan Mui Choo and Hoe Kah Hong, were sentenced to death for the killings. Their lurid story of murder, sex and superstition gripped the nation.

But it is the story of the nun who loved the women and met them every week for seven years until they were hanged in 1988 that Mr Chai chooses to tell in this film.

It was made for 15 Shorts, a biographical series about 15 Singaporeans who go to extraordinary lengths to help others. It was put together by the non-profit National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre, film company Blue3Asia and 15 Singaporean film-makers.

Instead of defending herself to Margaret, Sister Gerard kept silent.

Words were not needed, she told The Sunday Times before the public release of the film.

Instead, she shared in the young woman's pain by looking her steadily in the eyes and hugging her.

A pioneer in death row counselling, Sister Gerard, 80, co-founded the Roman Catholic Prison Ministry in 1977.

By releasing new details about the women's incarceration, the film adds an extra dimension to the public understanding of the high-profile case and the little-known realm of death row counselling.

The film reveals, for instance,

that the two women changed into blue satin dresses and white shoes before they were hanged.

While it was standard protocol then for death row prisoners to be hanged in their prison garb of beige clothes and slippers, Sister Gerard wanted the women to have dignity in death and sought permission for the dresses to be worn.

Told only three days before their hanging on Friday, Nov 25, 1988, she rushed another nun to stitch the clothes in record time.

"They asked me as they wore their dresses, 'How do I look?'"

"They were appreciating themselves, after having repented and forgiven themselves for what they had done. I was touched by the transformation I saw in them," said Sister Gerard.

The film shows how she placed rosaries in their hands and sang a hymn with the women as they walked to the gallows.

Tan had returned to her childhood Catholic faith in prison, and Hoe also eventually asked to be baptised as a Catholic.

Sister Gerard was praying and singing outside the hanging chamber when she heard the lever to the trapdoor being pulled.

18 DEATHS

In her 40 years of counselling prisoners until she stopped in 2017, Sister Gerard met 18 inmates on death row. They were convicted of murder or drug trafficking, and included Filipino domestic worker Flor Contemplacion, convicted of killing a fellow domestic worker and a four-year-old child, and Australian heroin trafficker Nguyen Tuong Van.

Sister Gerard was questioned many times about her work.

People would ask: What is the point of counselling doomed prisoners? Or the question Tan asked after the nun wrote to her in prison, requesting to see her: "Sister, how could you love me after what I have done?"

Her answer was always: "The condemned need hope. We may condemn them, but God condemns no one who comes to him."

She said death row counselling differs from other counselling. First, it is to prepare inmates for death. Second, it is crucial they admit they have broken the law so they can work through the shame and guilt to come to forgiveness and peace. In her experience, the



The new short film on Sister Gerard Fernandez's work in death row counselling is part of a biographical series about 15 Singaporeans who go to extraordinary lengths to help others. ST PHOTO: SAHIBA CHAUDHARY

TOUCHED BY WOMEN'S CHANGE

They asked me as they wore their dresses, 'How do I look?' They were appreciating themselves, after having repented and forgiven themselves for what they had done. I was touched by the transformation I saw in them.



SISTER GERARD FERNANDEZ, on Catherine Tan Mui Choo and Hoe Kah Hong who changed into blue satin dresses and white shoes before they were hanged.

top three regrets of inmates are the shame they caused their families, the mess they made of their lives and the freedom they had lost.

Each wanted to be reconciled with their families, experience healing and be given a second chance to prove they can change.

"I always see that transformation

in their lives and all of them face death calmly, peacefully and, sometimes, happily," said Sister Gerard.

There were eight executions in 2017, all for drug offences, according to the Singapore Prison Service – the highest number in 10 years.

Mr Alan John, former deputy editor of The Straits Times who wrote a book on the case, *Unholy Trinity*, said: "I'm glad the film shows the women in a kinder light. The public sentiment in the 1980s was such that it is hard to imagine any other judgment than to hang all three because people were so aghast at the cruelty of the child killings."

He added: "Today, I think the courts and the public might be more willing to see that Adrian manipulated and abused the two women to such a great extent that even though they assisted in the abductions and killings, they did not deserve to be executed as well."

Sister Gerard said she turned to God and prayer whenever she felt sad or burdened by a case.

"I don't know where I got the strength and courage to do this work but my strong relationship with God helped," she said.

"It was a privilege to walk with them till the end and see the beautiful change that came upon them."

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Sister Gerard wanted Catherine Tan Mui Choo (left) and Hoe Kah Hong to have dignity in death, and sought permission for them to wear dresses at their hanging, instead of the beige prison attire.

RITUAL MURDERS

In 1981, charlatan medium Adrian Lim and his two "holy wives", Catherine Tan Mui Choo and Hoe Kah Hong kidnapped, tortured and killed two children.

The first victim, Agnes Ng, nine, was abducted from a church, sexually assaulted and suffocated. Two weeks later, the body of Ghazali Marzuki, 10, was found. He had been lured from a playground, drugged, choked and drowned.

Lim and his "wives" were hanged in 1988.

• The public can watch the film at www.15shorts.com from Tuesday. The film is dedicated to 70x7, an initiative within Prison Fellowship Singapore that promotes restorative justice. Support the cause on Giving.sg at <https://www.giving.sg/web/70x7>

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Two Asian leopard cats rescued

Tee Zhuo

Two Asian leopard cats were rescued by the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres) after being abandoned at a Housing Board block in Bukit Batok.

Acres deputy chief executive Anbarasi Boopal told The Sunday Times yesterday that it had received a call on Dec 20 last year at around 10am. A member of the public said the cats were found in a carrier at an HDB block near Bukit Batok West Avenue 6.

"They appeared normal externally but were very stressed from the rescue, transfer and new environment," Ms Anbarasi added.

Acres has since referred the case to the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA).

In a Facebook post last Friday, Acres said that investigations were being conducted and added that the cats are currently under the care of the Singapore Zoo.

Asian leopard cats are shy, small nocturnal predators native to Sin-



Animal welfare group Acres rescued two Asian leopard cats found abandoned in a carrier at an HDB block in Bukit Batok after receiving a call on Dec 20. PHOTO: FACEBOOK/ACRES

gapore. Their diet consists of rodents, amphibians and reptiles.

ST reported in February 2016 that leopard cats are the last remaining wild cat species here, but are critically endangered due to the loss of their natural forest habitat.

One researcher estimated no more than 20 leopard cats living on the mainland at the time.

Leopard cats are also common victims of the illegal wildlife trade. They are hunted for the pet trade, for their bones, which are used in

some Asian traditional medicines, and for their fur.

Acres said in its Facebook post: "Please leave wild animals in the wild. If you think the wild animal is in distress, please call our 24-hour wildlife rescue hotline 9783-7782 for assistance." Members of the public with information on the ownership or sale of such animals should contact the AVA or Acres at acrescrime@gmail.com

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Able to show off their best



It was a case of putting your best foot forward yesterday when the THK Bravehearts, a group comprising folk with intellectual disabilities, roared into action with a lion dance for Dr Lily Neo, an MP for Jalan Besar GRC, and guests at Kreta Ayer Square.

The performers, residents at THK Home for Disabled @ Eunus, perform at community and corporate events, said THK chairman Lee Kim Siang. Proceeds from their engagements help raise funds for charity.

Mr Lee also announced the opening of new senior activity centres at Fengshan Blocks 101 and 114 to serve vulnerable seniors living in rented flats.

Dr Neo, who serenaded the audience at one point, was the guest of honour at yesterday's THK Spring Festival celebration, which also featured bhangra dance and Chinese drum performances.

ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

S'pore gears up for faster, car-lite transport by 2040

Land Transport Master Plan panel to submit recommendations to Govt by mid-February

Timothy Goh

Singapore's transport revolution is getting into high gear with predictions that 90 per cent of peak-hour journeys will be made either on foot, by bicycle or other car-lite means by 2040.

And if that isn't radical enough, it is estimated that 90 per cent of those trips will take 45 minutes or less to complete.

The vision was outlined by Land Transport Master Plan (LTMP) advisory panel member Richard Magnus at a focus group session yesterday.

The session – the fourth of its kind – involved around 50 people discussing the future of Singapore's land transport system.

Around 7,000 members of the public and industry stakeholders have already given their views through LTA-organised focus group sessions, electronic polls and listening points since last August.

Some of the issues raised yesterday included striking a balance between faster journeys, greater convenience and inclusivity, prioritising different modes of transport and finding a balance between safety and speed.

The panel will consider feedback gathered and formulate recommendations to be submitted to the Government by mid-February.

The recommendations up to now fall under three main themes.

Under the 20-minute town and 45-minute city vision, the panel sees a future where 90 per cent of peak-hour trips made by walking, cycling and riding shared transport will be no longer than 45 minutes.

It also envisages 90 per cent of residents should be able to get to their nearest neighbourhood centre by such means in 20 minutes or less. This will require measures such as more bus and cycling lanes and an expansion of the rail network.

Student Roderick Foo, a 13-year-old participant in yesterday's session, said: "It's a relief to know that

in the future we'll have this scheme so that we can travel faster."

A second theme centres on creating a more inclusive transport system supported by a caring and gracious commuting culture.

The third touches on safer and healthier journeys – not just in terms of personal health, but environmental impact as well. This demands a shift to cleaner transport solutions and more pedestrian-friendly and active mobility town centres.

LTMP advisory panel member Janil Puthucherry, who is also Senior Minister of State for Transport, said that if work starts now, these recommendations could become reality by 2040.

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‘First women’ of Congress

Class of 2019, most racially diverse batch in US, shatters glass ceilings to gain House seats

Charissa Yong
US Correspondent

The hoop earrings and bright red lipstick that Ms Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wore when sworn in as the youngest ever Congresswoman were not a look often seen in the House.

Neither was the headscarf donned by Ms Ilhan Omar or the traditional Palestinian thobe worn by Ms Rashida Tlaib, the first Muslim women to be elected to Congress.

But their unabashed pride in their heritage and femininity and

outspoken championing of their political beliefs are part of an approach that won them a place in history as members of the 116th Congress, America’s most racially diverse batch of lawmakers.

Several shattered glass ceilings. The class of 2019 includes the first Native American and Muslim women. Massachusetts and Connecticut elected their first African-American women to Congress, likewise Texas with its first two Hispanic women. Iowa sent its first two women to the House, while Arizona, Mississippi and Tennessee

elected their first female senators. Congress now has a record 127 women – nearly a quarter of all seats – according to Rutgers University’s Centre for Women and Politics. Out of these, 47 are women of colour.

The “first women” in particular are a new breed of politician with progressive agendas and a clear fondness for each other, frequently interacting with and backing each other up on social media.

They are equally at home making their cases on Twitter and talk shows, using Instagram and live-streams to give their social media followers glimpses into the corridors of power while breaking down the dense world of DC politics.

Their race and gender have made them the target of online hate and

127

Number of women in Congress, nearly a quarter of all seats.

47

Number of women of colour in the House.

attacks. In the week since they were sworn in, a fake nude photo of Ms Ocasio-Cortez and a fake Tweet of Ms Tlaib writing that “Americans have spent decades raping and pillaging my people” circulated.

Armed with humour and a deep familiarity with the Internet and pop culture references, they have, however, taken on the trolls and turned around would-be insults.

Ms Ocasio-Cortez responded to an old video of her dancing in college meant to shame her with a fresh video of herself dancing outside her congressional office. Ms Omar highlighted the poor spelling of an Instagram user who took potshots at her Islamic faith, writing: “Someone in my Instagram comments said I want to enforce Shakira Law.”

The women are keenly aware of the symbolism of their positions and their power to inspire young girls, especially those from minority races, into leadership and politics.

Ms Ocasio-Cortez wrote on Twitter that her lipstick and earrings were inspired by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Hispanic and third female Supreme Court justice, who was advised to wear neutral-coloured nail polish to her confirmation hearings to avoid scrutiny. She said: “She kept her red. Next time someone tells Bronx girls to take off their hoops, they can just say they’re dressing like a Congresswoman.”

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SEE INSIGHT B8

The 116th Congress has made history with the number of women of Native American, African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American roots sworn into office. **The Sunday Times** takes a look at the most prominent ‘glass ceiling shatterers’.

Youngest woman in Congress

It was not so long ago that the youngest Congresswoman in US history felt her life was over.

Ms Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez found herself bar-tending and waitressing at the age of 28, scrubbing tables after restaurant shifts and falling asleep on the subway ride home.

“I once got pick-pocketed, and everything I earned that day was stolen. That day, I locked myself in a room and cried deep... I honestly thought as a 28-year-old waitress I was too late; that the train of my fulfilled potential had left the station,” she said on Instagram.

Bronx-born and of Puerto Rican descent, the international relations and economics degree holder grew up watching her mother mop floors, drive school buses and answer phones to make ends meet, especially after her father died.

She brought the same work ethic to her race for a Congress seat, working on her campaign in the morning before waitressing and knocking on doors with volunteers in a grassroots campaign, unseating a long-time Democrat incumbent in a stunning turn of events at the primaries.



A self-professed socialist, her political beliefs fall towards the left, even

within the Democratic Party, and she is known for speaking out on issues of socio-economic inequality. Ms Ocasio-Cortez, 29, has used

her Twitter and Instagram accounts to highlight to her millions of followers privileges and practices other more traditional politi-

Ms Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 29, was bar-tending and waitressing before her historic election victory. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

cians would gloss over.

She was open about her financial struggles and not being able to afford rent in Washington DC before her official start date and new salary as a Congress member, pointing out that it was one of many barriers to politics faced by the working class.

She lamented how her insurance payments as a waitress were more than twice what she will pay as a member of Congress, using her Twitter account – where she has 1.38 million followers – to call for Medicare for all.

Predictably, she has been a lightning rod for right-wing criticism. Some of it has focused on attempting to debunk her origin story, with a reporter once posting a photo of her and adding, “that jacket and coat don’t look like a girl who struggles”.

But the media-savvy political star has been adept at turning around such attacks with incisive criticism, animated images and popular lyrics, and humour of her own.

Commentators have noted her ability to start national conversations, such as on her proposal to tax the rich by 70 per cent.

And in response to a tweet that said she was awe-inspiring, Ms Ocasio-Cortez wrote a note of encouragement: “Last year I was bar-tending, and I bought my first couch two weeks ago – shortly after I got health insurance. So don’t worry, growth doesn’t happen in a straight line.”

From war-torn Somalia to seat in US govt

It has been a remarkable journey by any measure – from a child in war-torn Somalia to a refugee camp in Kenya and, now, to a seat in Congress.

Ms Ilhan Omar, who was just 14 when her family left that Kenyan camp for a better life in Washington DC, has become the first Somali-American in Congress.

She returned this month with her proud father to the same airport they had arrived at as refugees 23 years ago to attend her swearing-in ceremony.

Ms Omar told Elle magazine last September that she had struggled to learn English and felt out of place in school as a Muslim and black person but her grandfather had sparked her interest in politics when he took her to local caucuses to act as his translator. “I wish he could be here to witness this historic moment, but he was here in spirit as I placed my hand on his Quran for the ceremonial swearing in,” she wrote on Twitter last week.



Ms Ilhan Omar made history as one of the first two Muslim women in Congress, prompting an overturn of a 181-year-old ban on head coverings to allow her to wear the hijab. PHOTO: REUTERS

The former Minnesota lawmaker made history as one of the first two Muslim women in Congress, prompting an overturn of a 181-year-old ban on head coverings to allow her to wear the hijab.

She has had to deal with Islamophobic abuse; a cab driver called her ISIS and threatened to remove her hijab after he picked her up from the White House, where she had attended a training session.

The 37-year-old mother of three champions progressive policies, including immigration reform.

“As someone who has seen what it means to seek asylum at a border and be received with such generosity, I want to make sure we understand there are other countries who take in so many of the world’s most pained people. In the United States we can do better,” she wrote on Twitter.

Congress’ first Palestinian-American

Hours after being sworn in as the first Palestinian-American in Congress, Ms Rashida Tlaib made more headlines when she swore – literally, with an expletive – to impeach President Donald Trump.

The comments were not at all out of character for the left-wing lawmaker, who was ejected in 2016 from a Trump campaign event in Detroit after heckling him.

Then a member of the group Moms Against Trump, she had asked him to return a Purple Heart award given to him by a military veteran, saying that he did not deserve it.

Born in Detroit to Palestinian immigrants, Ms Tlaib, 42, is the eldest of 14 children and helped raise her siblings growing up.

“It is something that is inspiring to many people – even if you’re not Muslim – to know that a girl like me who grew up poor in south Detroit, who didn’t speak English when I started school, with a faith that is literally being targeted every single



Born in Detroit to Palestinian immigrants, Ms Rashida Tlaib grew up poor and did not speak English when she started school. PHOTO: REUTERS

day by not only this administration but (also) the media, could run and win and make history,” she said in an interview with Detroit News last February.

The former Michigan state lawmaker, who is a Democratic socialist, refused to take corporate political action committee money while running and championed policies like Medicare for All and a US\$15 (\$\$20) minimum wage.

INSPIRATION TO MANY

It is something inspiring to many people – even if you’re not Muslim – to know that a girl like me... could run and win and make history.

”

MS RASHIDA TLAIB, in an interview with Detroit News last February.

First Native American woman elected

Former attorney and mixed martial arts fighter Sharice Davids made history when she became one of the first two Native American women to be elected to the US Congress.

It was such a big deal, noted National Geographic, because only 300 of the roughly 12,000 Congress lawmakers since 1789 have been of Native American descent – and all of them were men.

Ms Davids, a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation and also the first openly gay Kansan elected to Congress, is the daughter of a single mother who served in the United States Army. She earned a law de-



Ms Sharice Davids made history when she became one of the first two Native American women to be elected to Congress. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

gree from Cornell University and has lived and worked on Native American reservations while also

serving as a White House fellow during the transition between the Obama and Trump administrations.

Pioneer for female Native Americans

When Ms Deb Haaland was born in 1960, Native Americans in her state of New Mexico did not even have the right to vote; it came two years later in 1962.

Last month, she became one of the first two Native American women to be sworn into Congress, representing the state of New Mexico, home to the Laguna Pueblo tribe that she is part of.

Ms Haaland was born to a Native American mother and a Norwegian-American father, both of whom had military backgrounds. She went on to put herself through law school as a single mother, earning a degree in Indian law from the University of



Ms Deb Haaland, representing the state of New Mexico, became one of the first two Native American women to be sworn into Congress last month. PHOTO: REUTERS

New Mexico School of Law.

Ms Haaland, a former chair of New Mexico’s Democratic Party,

champions affordable healthcare, clean energy and combating climate change.

Texan aims to be US' first Hispanic leader

Democrat would be among underdogs in field that may feature heavyweight like former V-P

SAN ANTONIO/WASHINGTON • Former mayor of San Antonio, Texas, and Obama-era Cabinet member Julian Castro was expected yesterday to launch his bid to become the US' first Hispanic president, scheduling his announcement in a border state central to the country's immigration debate.

Mr Castro, 44, would become the most high-profile Democrat to date to officially enter the 2020 race, which is expected to see a diverse field of candidates eager to challenge President Donald Trump.

But he would be among the underdogs in a political showdown that may well feature heavyweights such as former vice-president Joe

Biden, senators Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders and Kamala Harris, and perhaps even billionaire businessman Michael Bloomberg.

Also in the race would be Congressman Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, a progressive Democrat, who is to officially announce her run soon.

Mr Castro's strong oratory skills, experience as Mr Barack Obama's housing secretary and as mayor of the US' seventh-largest city, not to mention his telegenic charisma, could help propel the Texas native into the top tier.

He would be the third prominent Latino presidential candidate in four years, after Republican senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio

fought Mr Trump for their party's nomination in 2016.

Mr Castro's candidacy could also help revive Democratic enthusiasm among Latino voters, who supported Mrs Hillary Clinton but at a lower rate than for Mr Obama.

Mr Trump made immigration a flashpoint of that race, and it is still among the most contentious issues in the US. The government is in a partial shutdown, soon to begin its fourth week, over Mr Trump's demand for US\$5.7 billion (S\$7.7 billion) in border wall funding.

Mr Castro's national profile took off in 2012, when he became the first Latino to give a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. Four years later, he was a finalist to be Mrs Clinton's running mate.

A fierce Trump critic, Mr Castro is a third-generation American. Last



Mr Julian Castro would become the most high-profile Democrat to date to officially enter the 2020 presidential race, which is expected to see a diverse field of candidates including Ms Tulsi Gabbard, who is the first Hindu member of Congress and also its first Samoan American. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

year, he said he probably would not be in the United States if today's strict immigration policies were in place when his grandmother crossed the border as a girl in 1922.

In his convention speech, Mr Castro highlighted "an unlikely journey", including growing up with his twin brother Joaquin, who is a US congressman. The phrase became the title of his new memoir that was published last month.

Meanwhile, Ms Gabbard, an Iraq War veteran who met dictator

Bashar al-Assad in Syria during its devastating civil war, told CNN last Friday: "I have decided to run and will be making a formal announcement within the next week."

If elected, the 37-year-old lawmaker would be the youngest president in US history. She is the first Hindu member of Congress and also its first Samoan American.

"There are a lot of reasons for me to make this decision. There are a lot of challenges that are facing the American people that I'm con-

cerned about and that I want to help solve," she said, citing health-care access and climate change as among the issues.

Ms Gabbard sits on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where she is able to influence US foreign policy. "There is one main issue that is central to the rest, and that is the issue of war and peace," she said.

She was deployed to Iraq in 2005, and she maintains her role as a member of the Hawaii National Guard. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

A fighter with the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces near Manbij, Syria, last month. After media reports suggested the departure of US forces had begun, the Pentagon later said no troops had yet withdrawn and stressed that the battle against ISIS was continuing. PHOTO: NYTIMES



Gear, not troops, being withdrawn from Syria, US says

QAMISHLI (Syria)/WASHINGTON • The US-led coalition battling the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) added to the confusion surrounding the US withdrawal from Syria last Friday by saying it had started the pullout process, but officials later clarified that only equipment was being withdrawn, not troops.

US President Donald Trump's announcement last month that he

had decided to withdraw the 2,000 troops there stunned allies who had joined Washington in the battle against ISIS militants in Syria. Senior US officials were shocked too, including then Defence Secretary James Mattis, who quit in protest.

US Colonel Sean Ryan, a coalition spokesman, said it "has begun the process of our deliberate withdrawal from Syria", adding: "Out of

concern for operational security, we will not discuss specific timelines, locations or troop movements."

After media reports suggested the departure of US forces had begun, the Pentagon later said no troops had yet withdrawn and stressed that the battle against ISIS was continuing as US-backed forces try to capture the group's last remaining pockets of territory in Syria.

US officials confirmed that equipment was being moved out of Syria, a sign that despite mixed messages from Washington, preparations for a withdrawal were proceeding.

The US decision has injected new uncertainty into the eight-year-long Syrian war and spurred a flurry of contacts over how a resulting security vacuum will be filled across a swathe of north and east Syria.

Turkey aims to pursue a campaign against Kurdish forces that have allied with the US, while the Russia- and Iran-backed Syrian government sees the chance to recover a huge chunk of territory.

Ankara views the US-backed YPG Syrian Kurdish militia as an extension of rebel group Kurdistan Workers' Party.

Turkey has also repeatedly threatened to attack Syria's flashpoint city of Manbij and a large swathe of Kurdish-held territory farther east along its border.

REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WorldBriefs

Nissan exec quits as Ghosn probe widens

TOKYO • A Nissan Motor top executive announced his resignation last Friday, further rattling the Japanese carmaker's management as it broadens a probe into ousted chairman Carlos Ghosn's alleged financial misconduct.

Mr Jose Munoz, seen as a Ghosn ally and a possible successor to lead the partnership between Nissan and France's Renault, had been a "person of interest" in the widening internal probe. REUTERS

Modi launches India election campaign

NEW DELHI • Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked off his re-election campaign yesterday, saying he had "miles to go" before his vision for a new India is completed, as he sought support to ensure his administration returns for a second term. BLOOMBERG

Zimbabwe plans to launch new currency

HARARE • Zimbabwe said last Friday it will introduce a new currency in the next 12 months as a shortage of US dollars plunges the financial system into disarray. REUTERS

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Fears of panic buying at shops as no-deal Brexit looms

British police advise retailers to consider extra security measures

LONDON • British police have said they are advising retailers to consider extra security measures in case of panic-buying as the deadline for Brexit approaches without a divorce deal in place.

London's Metropolitan Police revealed they were issuing the advice in case uncertainty around Britain's exit from the EU led to a surge in people trying to stockpile goods.

"We are suggesting to retailers that they may wish to consider planning for additional security in the event that concerns about short-

ages of goods leads to a significant increase in customers," they said in a statement last Friday.

The message was also a bid to minimise the demands on policing that large crowds and queues might cause, the police added.

Britain is due to leave the European Union on March 29.

A withdrawal agreement negotiated with the bloc by Prime Minister Theresa May looks set to be rejected by MPs in Parliament on Tuesday amid fierce opposition from Brexiters and Remainers.

Mrs May has insisted that could lead to leaving without a deal, a scenario that some have warned could cause chaos across Britain, including gridlock at ports.

Retailers appeared to be reacting cautiously to the police advice.

Mr James Martin, policy adviser on crime at the British Retail Consortium, said its roughly 5,000 members would work with police to keep shops running smoothly.

"Even if circumstances change, retailers are well-versed in providing effective security measures to protect customers and employees," he added.

Meanwhile, senior ministers are said to be urging Mrs May to seek help from her arch-rival – opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn – if Parliament kills her Brexit deal in the crunch vote this week.

A group of mainly pro-European ministers want Mrs May to invite

Mr Corbyn to meet her for negotiations in the hope of agreeing on a joint plan, according to people familiar with the matter.

Mrs May will ask Parliament to approve the divorce terms she has negotiated with the EU on Tuesday.

Her problem is that her Conservative Party has no overall majority in the House of Commons, and scores of her own members hate the deal she has struck with the EU and have vowed to oppose it.

The Prime Minister has already pushed the crucial vote on ratifying the Brexit package back by a month in a bid to win people over.

The tactical delay seems to have failed and Mrs May now looks set for a decisive defeat.

The question is what she should do next.

If Parliament fails to agree on the terms of the divorce, Britain will be on course to lurch out of the 28-country bloc on March 29 without any new trading arrangement in place.

According to official analysis, such a chaotic split could see the pound fall as much as 25 per cent while house prices could drop by up to 30 per cent, risking a recession.

While Brexiters argue that Mrs May should go back to the EU and renegotiate the most contentious parts of the deal, most other Members of Parliament say this would be a pointless request to which Brussels would never agree.

Instead, six Cabinet ministers and two other ministers want Mrs May to find the votes she needs to get her exit deal through Parliament from the official opposition Labour Party, according to people familiar with the matter.

Another possibility being discussed by ministers is the idea of allowing Parliament to vote on different Brexit options, to test which has support.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, BLOOMBERG

Four killed in gas explosion in Paris

A huge explosion, probably caused by a gas leak, gutted the ground floor of a building in a central Paris shopping district yesterday, killing four people and injuring 47 others, the authorities said.

Emergency staff helped victims (right) as police stayed on high alert in the French capital for a ninth consecutive Saturday of "yellow vest" protests, with large parts of the city centre blocked off by riot police.

In recent years, France has suffered Islamist militant attacks in Paris, Nice, Marseille and beyond. But Paris prosecutor Remi Heitz was quick to rule out foul play in yesterday's blast. "We still need to determine the circumstances and cause of the explosion but at this stage, we can say it is clearly an accident, presumably a gas leak," he told reporters.

A police source said the explosion tore apart a bakery on the Rue Trevis in the Grands Boulevards district before firefighters arrived on the scene (below) to put out the flames.

PHOTOS: EPA-EFE, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



'Yellow vest' protesters in Paris face water cannon

PARIS • Police in Paris used water cannon and tear gas to chase "yellow vest" protesters away from the Arc de Triomphe monument yesterday in the ninth straight weekend of protests against French President Emmanuel Macron's economic reforms.

Thousands of protesters also marched noisily but peacefully through the Grands Boulevards shopping area in northern Paris close to where a major gas explosion in a bakery killed four people earlier.

Central Paris was in lockdown against another feared eruption of violence by radical elements in the "gilets jaunes" (yellow vest) movement, with bridges across the Seine River closed and official buildings such as Parliament and the Elysee presidential palace protected by police barriers.

Groups of protesters also gathered on and around Paris's famous Champs Elysees boulevard, the scene of disturbances in recent weeks, many of them calling loudly for Mr Macron to resign.

"Macron, we are going to tear down your place!" one banner read.

Around the 19th-century Arc de Triomphe at the top of the Champs Elysee, riot police unleashed water cannon and tear gas at militant protesters after being pelted with stones and paint, witnesses said.

By mid-afternoon, there had been no major clashes with police unlike in previous weeks.

In Paris, more than 50 people were arrested, some for carrying objects that could be used as weapons.

There were also thousands of marchers in the cities of Bordeaux and Toulon in southern France as well as Strasbourg in the east and the central city of Bourges.

The Bourges authorities said nearly 5,000 yellow vests stuck to the designated demonstration area but another 500 had pushed into the city centre that was off-limits to demonstrators.

Many businesses in Bourges had boarded themselves up to avoid damage from protesters and the authorities had removed street furniture and building site materials that could be used for barricades.

Nationwide, more than 80,000 security forces were on duty for the protests, including 5,000 in Paris. REUTERS

80,000

Number of security forces on hand this weekend.

Four-way fight in Cameron Highlands by-election

CAMERON HIGHLANDS • A closely watched by-election in Pahang's Cameron Highlands constituency will witness a four-cornered fight.

Malaysia's ruling alliance Pakatan Harapan (PH) is fielding Mr Manogaran Marimuthu from the Democratic Action Party, while the main opposition party Barisan Nasional (BN) is being represented by Mr Ramli Mohd Noor from Umno.

The other two men in the contest are independent candidates, local farmer Wong Seng Yee and former lecturer Sallehudin Ab Talib.

Their nomination forms were accepted by the returning officer yesterday.

There is a 14-day campaign period before the Jan 26 vote.

PH candidate Manogaran suffered a narrow 567-vote defeat in the May general election, which was won by a BN candidate. But the

result was annulled in November after an election court ruled that BN had won due to bribery.

BN's Mr Ramli was the police force's highest-ever ranked Orang Asli (aboriginal tribesman).

The Cameron Highlands ward has the highest percentage of Orang Asli among the 222 Malaysian parliamentary wards.

Of the 32,000 voters, the Orang Asli comprise 21 per cent, Malays 34 per cent, Chinese 30 per cent, and Indians 15 per cent.

The Pahang ward also produces a big chunk of the country's vegetables, flowers and fruit, with some of the output exported to countries such as Singapore.

Analysts expect a tough fight for PH, eight months after it won federal power and as it struggles to deliver on election promises.

PH is also facing headwinds that



The four men contesting the Cameron Highlands by-election are (from far left) independents Sallehudin Ab Talib, Wong Seng Yee, BN's Ramli Mohd Noor and PH's Manogaran Marimuthu. PHOTO: BERNAMA

are set to slow the economy over the next two years, and growing anxiety among the Malay-Muslim majority over the erosion of special privileges they have enjoyed for

decades. The Cameron Highlands by-election is the fifth since Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad took power – with three for state assembly seats in Selangor won handsomely by

PH. The fourth was the forced parliamentary vote in Port Dickson to allow PH leader Anwar Ibrahim to return to Parliament.

THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

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SOUS VIDE GOODNESS WITHIN MINUTES

Avid home chefs would have heard of the sous vide cooking technique that had taken the culinary world by storm. This modern cooking technique produces delectable food with its natural juices and nutrients sealed in to give you a tantalizing gourmet experience. At Wafuken, you can get such gourmet quality food at affordable prices, fully customizable to your dietary plans and needs.

Wafuken is reportedly Singapore's first sous vide themed restaurant. Sous vide, which means "under vacuum" in French, refers to the process of vacuum-sealing food in a bag, then slow-cooking it to a very precise temperature in a water bath. This cooking technique produces results that are impossible to achieve in any cooking

method. Steaks are perfectly cooked from edge to edge, with no loss in volume when cooking. Salmon is cooked to a translucent pink, with a delicate and flaky texture, with minimal moisture and volume loss while cooking. However, as the saying goes - good things take time. A sous vide cooked meal can take an hour, or even more, to be ready.

At Wafuken, you can do away with the arduous wait and enjoy your choice of sous vide cooked protein within minutes. All protein choices are naturally flavoured with a combination of herbs and spices to give you a delicious, healthy and precisely cooked meal. To top up the gourmet experience, every meal is fully customisable. Be it a low carbohydrates, gluten free or paleo diet, there's always something for everyone.

Simply begin with your choice of sous vide cooked protein; chicken, beef, smoked duck, fish and prawns. Wafuken prides its

signature sous vide chicken breast to be tender and moist like no other. Steak lovers will not be disappointed as Wafuken serves a well-marbled, 100-day grain fed oyster blade steak cooked to a precise medium rare. Fish and seafood lovers, fret not, for you are not forgotten. You have your choice of Norwegian salmon, saba fillets and airfrown codfish from France, perfectly cooked, moist and flavourful, with its omega 3 goodness fully retained during the cooking process. Starting prices for proteins comes at an affordable price of \$4. Diners can also choose to add on their choice of carbohydrates and sides to complete their meal.

Wafuken is now available for islandwide delivery via their website at www.wafuken.com. Also available for delivery on Deliveroo, FoodPanda and Grabfood, having a healthy sous vide lunch is now easily available within minutes in the comfort of your office.

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Singapore 018961

WAFUKEN OUE DOWNTOWN OUTLET
6A Shenton Way,
OUE Downtown Gallery, #02-23,
Singapore 068815



Photo: Wafuken



Photo: M Hotel

PIG-OUT AND PROSPER AT M HOTEL

Huat ah! Grab your chopsticks and 'Lo hee' to a bountiful Year of the Pig with M Hotel Singapore's treasure trove of Chinese New Year Goodies.

Whether you choose to takeaway or dine-in at the hotel's Café 2000 and The Buffet restaurant, the trio of Yu Sheng choices (Auspicious Smoked Salmon / Abundance Abalone / Three Treasures) will help you usher in a prosperous Lunar New Year. Prices start from \$58 for a 4-6 persons serving and \$78 for a 7-10 persons serving.

For those hosting family and friends at home, pair a Large Smoked Salmon Yu Sheng with the Abalone Treasure Pot (Pen Cai) - \$278 (U.P. \$366), serves 8-10 - a delightful mix of premium delicacies such as baby abalones, dried oysters, prawns, roast duck, soy chicken wings, roast pork and mushrooms with quality stock. Better yet,

it's served in a large takeaway claypot that you can easily heat up. For a larger group, get the Triple Happiness Combo with the addition of the Signature Jumbo Chicken Pie with Mushroom and Fatt Choy at only \$308 (U.P. \$411).

Nothing says Chinese New Year better than a reunion feast... and M Hotel offers two sumptuous buffets to choose from: Café 2000's Bountiful Seafood and Barbecue, and The Buffet restaurant's Eight Treasures Premium Steamboat.

Indulge on favourites like BBQ delights of grilled Bak Kwa and Taiwanese sausages, a lavish seafood selection of slipper lobsters, jumbo prawns and ocean scallops, as well as the tender whole roast suckling pig at Café 2000. At The Buffet restaurant, the hearty Eight Treasures broth awaits with a wide selection of succulent prawns, crabs and other seafood, making for a scrumptious hot pot.

All Reunion Dinner (4 February) reservations made before 27 January will enjoy 20% off: adults \$95 (U.P. \$118) and children \$54 (U.P. \$68). Enjoy a glass of Tiger on the house at Café 2000 and one free baby abalone and mini Pen Cai at The Buffet. Both buffets are also available on the first and second day of Chinese New Year, with prices starting from \$68 for adults and \$38 for children. For *Ren Ri* (11 Feb) and *Chap Goh Mei* (19 Feb), enjoy a hotpot buffet with one free baby abalone at \$78 for adults and \$48 for children.

Prefer a more exclusive, private setting for your gathering? With a minimum of three tables, you can host business partners, colleagues or loved ones in the hotel's private function rooms with three Prosperity Lunar New Year set menus priced from \$688 per table (for 10 pax). The Chinese New Year-themed table centerpieces, Mandarin oranges and other

perks such as complimentary* house wine or beer are sure to get you in the mood to raise a toast to a prosperous Year of the Pig! Located in the heart of the city, M Hotel is just a five-minute walk from Tanjong Pagar MRT.

*Subject to meeting a minimum number of tables. All prices are subject to 10% service charge and 7% GST for dine-in, and 7% GST for takeaway. For the full list of Chinese New Year offerings and pricing, please visit www.m-hotel.com. For reservations with Café 2000, please call 65006112 or email cafe2000.mhs@millenniumhotels.com. For reservations with The Buffet, please call 65006116 or email thebuffet.mhs@millenniumhotels.com.

SPH REWARDS MEMBERS CAN ENJOY 25% OFF CHINESE NEW YEAR GOODIES FOR RESERVATIONS MADE BY 31 JANUARY. KINDLY FILL IN THE ORDER FORM AT goo.gl/xEGLC9 and email info.mhs@millenniumhotels.com

This discount is not applicable to the Double Happiness and Triple Happiness Combos.

REALLY HEALTHY AND HAPPY SNACKS

Like it or not, most of us love our snacks. Some of us even have a not-so-secret drawer at work that is dedicated to our stash of snacks - chocolate bars, chips, and sweets to munch the stress and mental blocks away. If you feel guilty after chomping on chips or chocolate bars, check out BrilliantConnects.com, an online store which sells healthy and most importantly, satisfying snacks.

BrilliantConnects.com carries a range of imported unique and healthy snacks. Vegetarian-friendly, free of trans-fats, MSG, coloring, artificial flavorings, and preservatives, yet tasty and highly satisfying, these snacks are suitable for both young children and adults.

The benefits of coconuts have been well talked about in recent years, to the extent of being coined as a miracle food by some. Coconuts are highly nutritious, rich in fibre, and packed with essential vitamins and minerals. Take in some of these benefits while snacking on Maprow Coconut Chips. Made from real coconuts, these chips are baked to crispy perfection without using oil and are thus free of trans-fat. Maprow Coconut Chips is available in five flavours - Honey, Original, Siracha, Tomyum, Wasabi.

An interesting item to try is Sesame Bars - healthy snack bars made from organically grown sesame seeds. Packed with a slew of amazing health benefits like high omega 3, these small seeds are not to be looked down upon. You can enjoy three different types of sesame seed bars in four different flavours. Black and White sesame bars come in four flavours each - Honey,

Ginger, Carrot, Barley, Mixed seeds (White, Black and Perilla seeds) bars are available in Honey, Ginger and Sugarcane flavours. BrilliantConnects.com is offering all SPH subscribers a special deal. You can now buy any five Sesame Bars and Maprow Coconut chips at a special promotional price of \$10 on BrilliantConnects.sg today.

The Wholesome Energy Pearl is an energy ball made from Black and White Sesame seed, Perilla seeds, roasted Riceberry, and 70% Dark Chocolate. With this, you can get your chocolate fix, replenish your energy and not feel guilty about it. Grab 3 boxes of Wholesome Energy Pearl for the price of 2 via the website.

Check out the Thai Mini Rice Crackers, which comes in a cute packaging

that makes it almost too attractive to eat. The mini rice crackers are made of rice, is gluten-free and comes in four tasty flavors - Original, Tom Yum, Butter, and BBQ. These rice crackers is a definite hit amongst children. Maruti Crispy Golden Beans are made of green beans, which are packed with protein. These crispy beans will make a great Chinese New Year table snack. You can also serve it as a salad topping, or as garnishing on rice. The Crispy Golden Beans is available in six addictive flavors: Classic, Original, Pepper, Seaweed, Tomyum, Paprika, and Wasabi. Soon, we will introduce new flavors of crispy rice crackers to Singapore local taste. BrilliantConnects.com is offering all SPH subscribers a promotional price of any 6 packets of Crispy Golden Beans or Mini Rice Chips for just \$10.

FOR SUBSCRIBERS: GRAB YOUR CHINESE NEW YEAR GOODIES AND REPLENISH YOUR SNACK DRAWER WITH SOME SATISFYING AND HEALTHY SNACKS TODAY. SIMPLY VISIT WWW.BRILLIANTCONNECTS.COM TO CART YOUR ITEMS. REMEMBER TO USE THE PROMO CODE 'SPH01' TO ENJOY THE ABOVE DEALS!

Terms and conditions apply.



Photos: Brilliant Connect



Photo: Yue Hwa

CHINESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATION AWAITS AT YUE HWA!

Chinese New Year is a time when people celebrate the spring of reunion together with their families. Being one of the most important festivals, it includes many other activities such as shopping for new clothes and New Year goodies, doing spring cleaning, setting up new year decorations, putting up red couplets, staying up late on New Year's eve, watching fireworks, visiting relatives and friends, and seniors giving red packets to the younger ones.

Established in Hong Kong over 50 years ago, Yue Hwa specialises in Chinese silk, food, tea, cheongsams,

antiques and gifts, making it your one-stop destination to find things you normally do not see in a regular shopping mall. From hampers, food, clothes to decorative items, which are all related to Chinese New Year, you can find them all at Yue Hwa.

Spend \$38 or more to redeem a set of limited edition red packets at Yue Hwa. What's more exciting is that if you spend \$150 or more, you also get to redeem an elegant Prosperity pouch on top of the red packets.

Other than shopping, do join us at our live calligraphy sessions from 15 January to 31 January! For dumpling lovers, you get free sampling of handmade dumplings and Xiao Long

Bao every Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 5 January to 27 January. Both events will be held at Yue Hwa Building @ Chinatown.

Yue Hwa is conveniently located in almost every part of Singapore at Yue Hwa Building @ Chinatown, Jurong Point, Heartland Mall, Eastpoint Mall and Northpoint City. Shopping can also be literally just a click away at https://www.yuehwa.com.sg/sphrewards.

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China’s military turns on charm offensive

Light-hearted videos of soldiers win fans in PLA’s social media push

Lim Yan Liang
China Correspondent
In Beijing

Kneeling on the ground, a soldier in full camouflage lights a mosaic of tealights that forms the Chinese characters for “happy birthday”.

He and his platoon mates then sing a hearty birthday song to his sweetheart.

“My dear, I regret not being able to spend your birthday with you as I’m training with my brothers,” he says to the camera. “So I want to give you my love through this video.”

The short video, which drew 15,000 likes in two days, was posted on the official People’s Liberation Army (PLA) account on Douyin, a Snapchat-like video-sharing platform popular among Chinese youth.

This and other short clips aimed at depicting the everyday life of its uniformed personnel are exceedingly popular on Douyin, and speak of a PLA reaching out to a new generation of Chinese with technology, as well as a friendlier face.

Since last year, at least 15 official military accounts have been launched, alongside thousands from other government and party departments on the video-sharing platform, as part of an official push by the state to tap new media to reach the masses.

None have been as successful as the military accounts, according to Douyin. While armed forces accounts make up just 0.3 per cent of government accounts, they draw 4



From left: A soldier serenading the camera, complete with a Korean “finger heart” gesture and superimposed emojis; a soldier’s military-themed wedding photo shoot featuring a dramatic underwater scene; and soldiers performing a synchronised dance in -10 deg C weather. Light-hearted posts such as these are a hit on Chinese videosharing platform Douyin, with military accounts among the most popular government postings on the platform. PHOTOS: DOUYIN



per cent of total viewership.

The official PLA account, which was launched last October, drew over a million followers within seven hours. It has 3.9 million followers today, while its publicity division owns a separate account with 4.4 million followers.

One of the first Chinese Communist Party organisations to jump on the Douyin bandwagon was the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League. It has posted over 200 videos and has 2.83 million followers. A less popular account is that of the Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, with 830,000 followers.

Since then, the various arms of the PLA have launched their own Douyin accounts, including the

navy, air force and the People’s Armed Police.

Even the various commands – in charge of different regions in China – have put out slickly edited clips of their arsenals and of soldiers training. The accounts have attracted 5.4 million fans.

The most popular videos are often not of traditional military propaganda but light-hearted clips, such as those of soldiers singing in their bunks or doing a synchronised dance on the running track. One popular clip has a soldier chopping chillies while wearing a gas mask, apparently to prevent tearing.

Military experts said the PLA’s willingness to venture into new media and show a softer side of the military indicates that the army is evolving with the times in its out-

reach to the Chinese public.

“This tradition of political work has been embedded in the PLA since the revolutionary days, with leaders such as Lin Biao and Zhou Enlai both having taken to the stage in their time to unite the army and influence society,” said military analyst Wang Xiangsui of Beihang University.

That these videos have been sanctioned by the party-state also shows the PLA leadership’s awareness of social media as a soft-power tool to appeal to the young, while portraying the human side of the PLA, said Mr James Char, an expert on the Chinese military at Nanyang Technological University.

But a softer edge does not mean the objectives, such as of fostering patriotism, have changed, said Professor Wang. This includes spread-

ing rhetoric such as how China is indivisible, and getting the Chinese public to support a strong military presence in restive places like Xinjiang and disputed parts of the Chinese border.

One style of short clips on the platform involves impromptu-looking videos of a soldier interviewing another in often inhospitable border territory, such as at a mountain pass at 4,600m on the border with India, or in far-flung Xinjiang.

In one clip, armed soldiers putting on balaclavas and winter gear are interviewed while getting ready to go out on patrol in heavy snowfall.

“Xinjiang is truly beautiful,” says one. “We must protect Xinjiang,” says another.

yanliang@sph.com.sg

Weather

Singapore
24/34°C



Today

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.

Outlook

Monday & Tuesday:
Afternoon thundery showers.

Air quality

PSI
37-49 (Good)
24-hour reading as of 5pm yesterday

Sunrise
7.12am

Sunset
7.15pm

Moonrise
12.21pm

Moonset
12am

North
Thunderstorm

South
Thunderstorm

East
Thunderstorm

West
Thunderstorm

Central
Thunderstorm

Tides

Today: 3.45am (2.7m), 9.15am (1.5m), 3.05pm (2.6m), 9.30pm (1m).

Tomorrow: 4.24am (2.6m), 10.11am (1.5m), 4.03pm (2.4m), 10.15pm (1.2m).

Chang’e-4 sends complete view of moon’s far side

BEIJING • China’s lunar probe has sent the first panoramic image of its landing site since its historic arrival on the far side of the moon, showing the cratered landscape it is exploring.

The Chang’e-4 mission – named after a moon goddess – made the world’s first soft landing on the moon’s far side on Jan 3, a major step in China’s ambitions to become a space superpower.

A rover dubbed Yutu-2 – the name of the moon goddess’ pet, the Jade Rabbit – successfully separated from the lander and drove onto the moon’s surface last Thursday.

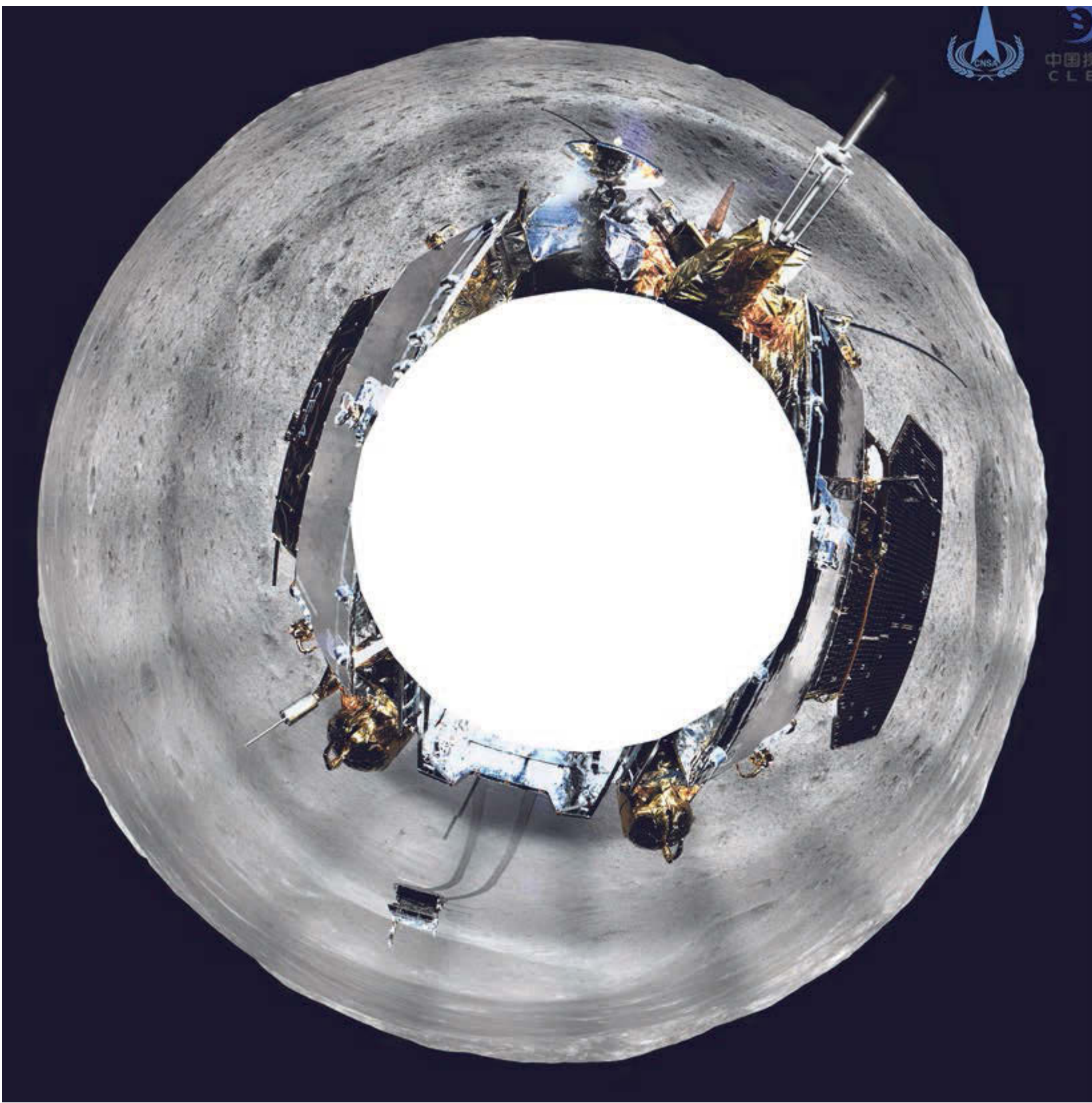
A camera deployed on Chang’e-4 took a photo that was released by the China National Space Administration (CNSA) the next day.

The picture shows the grey moon-scape, the lander and the rover with the track marks it left behind. The image is a circular, 360-degree shot, which scientists used to create another wide panoramic picture. “Researchers have completed the preliminary analysis of the lunar surface topography around the landing site based on the image taken by the landing camera,” the CNSA said in a statement.

Chang’e-4, Yutu-2 and the Queqiao relay satellite that beams data back to Earth are “in a stable condition, and all work was carried out as planned”, the statement said.

The 140kg rover resumed activities last Thursday after being on “stand-by mode” for five days.

Chang’e-4 landed within the South Pole-Aitken (SPA) Basin, the



largest and deepest impact crater in the solar system.

Scientists have said the far side is a key area for solving several un-

knowns about the moon, including its internal structure and thermal evolution.

This is the second Chinese probe

to land on the moon, following the first Yutu rover mission on its Earth-facing side in 2013.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

This photo shows the panoramic image made by China’s Chang’e-4 lunar probe on the far side of the moon. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Xi ‘highly likely’ to visit N. Korea in April

SEOUL • Chinese President Xi Jinping is highly likely to visit North Korea in April, followed by a trip to South Korea in May, South Korea’s ruling party leader said.

“It seems like Chinese President Xi Jinping is slated to visit North Korea in April, and there is a high possibility that he will visit South Korea in May,” Democratic Party leader Lee

Hae-chan said last Friday at a meeting with new presidential chief of staff Noh Young-min during his courtesy call on the National Assembly.

“A summit between China and North Korea, followed by a second US-North Korea summit and inter-Korea summit will foster peace in North-east Asia,” Mr Lee said.

He also said the path for inter-Korea economic exchanges and cooperation is now visible, which could revitalise the economy.

Mr Xi had met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Beijing last week – their fourth summit meeting – during the latter’s four-day visit to the Chinese capital.

China is considered the best buf-

fer North Korea has against United States pressure and sanctions as Mr Kim prepares for a second meeting with President Donald Trump.

He also consulted with Mr Xi before and after his first meeting with Mr Trump, which took place in Singapore in June last year.

The June meeting produced a vaguely worded agreement to “work towards complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula” and “new” relations between North Korea and the US, which have been adversaries for seven decades.

But talks have stalled over how to implement the Singapore deal.

Washington wants Pyongyang to start dismantling its nuclear facilities and weapons, while North Korea has demanded that the US first build trust with corresponding measures, starting with the easing of sanctions.

When Mr Xi met Mr Kim last Tuesday, the Chinese leader urged North Korea and the US to meet each other “in the middle”, China’s Xinhua news agency reported.

KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Cracks in Sydney tower raise wider safety concerns

Don't let developers choose own building certifiers, experts urge

Jonathan Pearlman
For The Straits Times
In Sydney

Billed as a family-friendly apartment complex, the 36-storey Opal Tower in the geographic heart of Sydney was described by its developers as “brilliant from every aspect”. But the A\$165 million (S\$161 million) project on the site used for the Sydney Olympics in 2000 has since been described by some disappointed flat owners as a “lemon”.

For the past three weeks, residents of the 392-apartment complex have been staying in hotels and other lodgings after cracking noises were heard on Christmas Eve.

All residents in the building were then evacuated after the discovery of cracks in a concrete panel on the 10th floor. Cracks were later found in other parts of the building.

Yesterday, most residents were finally allowed to start moving back into their homes after engineers deemed the building structurally sound. About 50 apartments will remain evacuated.

But the ordeal will not end there. The case has raised questions about whether corners are being dangerously cut in the rush to build high-rise homes in Sydney and Melbourne, where booming prices have fuelled a development surge.

Some experts have urged the New South Wales government to change a controversial rule, introduced in 1998, that lets developers choose their own private building certifiers. A journalist who has focused on local planning issues, Mr Harvey Gren-

nan, said the certification system favours property developers.

“Government appointment by panel or a rotating list of certifiers so they are appointed randomly to developers is the obvious answer to the system’s inherent and sometimes corrupt conflict of interest,” he wrote in The Sydney Morning Herald. “But both sides of politics have resisted the obvious for two decades, so don’t hold your breath.”

Following the evacuation of the Opal’s residents, the NSW government promised to crack down on errant building certifiers. It plans to audit about 30 per cent of the state’s certifiers each year.

But the Association of Accredited Certifiers, which represents the state’s certifiers, said the problem was not the use of private certifiers but the failure to assess standards of work by tradespeople and sub-contractors such as people who do concreting and waterproofing.

Most experts agree that the problem is widespread and that further Opal-type situations are likely.

Large Australian cities such as Sydney and Melbourne are growing fast and have become increasingly congested, prompting the state authorities to promote high-rise living. But there are concerns that this rush to grow vertically has not been matched by adequate oversight.

There is little data in New South Wales about the extent of defects in apartment buildings.

A survey in 2012, conducted by City Futures Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, found that 72 per cent of owners of apartments and shared blocks – and 85 per cent in buildings built since 2000 – knew of at least one significant defect in their complex. The most common defects were cracking, internal water leaks and water



Police and firefighters in front of Opal Tower in Sydney on Christmas Day, after residents of the 36-storey building were evacuated the night before, when cracking sounds were heard. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

entering from outside.

University of New South Wales’ architecture lecturer Geoff Hanmer said state governments need to introduce effective oversight of building standards throughout the construction, rather than just relying on approvals at the start and end of the development process. He proposed setting up an independent assessment body that could check buildings and assign a star rating out of five, like the system used for car safety.

“If the NSW and Victorian governments are serious about having a greater proportion of people live in multi-unit developments, they have a responsibility to do something about their quality before we are left with an overhang of misery, leaks and failures,” he wrote on The Conversation website last Thursday.

Mr Hanmer pointed out that it is much cheaper to prevent defects than to fix them after a building is completed, particularly in large multi-storey apartment blocks.

For now, most of the Opal tower residents are likely to return home with some trepidation. The builder, Icon, has advised residents that engineers have completed “stabilisation works” and the building is now safe. The NSW government is conducting its own investigation.

But residents are upset and are unsure whether to continue living in the tower or move out.

“My family members are paranoid with the idea of living in an apartment which is portrayed in the media so badly,” said one resident on a Facebook page for Opal residents. “As much as I believe the building could be safe or what not, it has put me in a dilemma regarding whether I should continue leasing or break my lease regardless of outcome.”

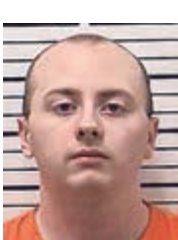
jonathanmpearlman@gmail.com

US teen who fled her captor called a hero by sheriff

WISCONSIN • A 13-year-old girl’s escape from a rural home where she was held captive for three months by a Wisconsin man charged with murdering her parents helped break the case and she should be treated as a hero, the local sheriff has said.



Jayne Closs is with her aunt after her rescue last Thursday and has been reunited with the rest of her family and her dog, Barron County Sheriff Chris Fitzgerald told reporters last Friday.



Thousands of volunteers and hundreds of law enforcement officers had searched the small town of Barron after Jayme’s parents were found shot dead in their home last October, their front door blown open with a shotgun, their daughter gone.

Jayne had been targeted by suspected kidnapper Jake Patterson, 21, who planned the murder of the teen’s parents, even shaving his head to avoid leaving forensic evidence at the crime scene, Mr Fitzgerald said. “Jayme was the target. The suspect had specific intentions to kidnap Jayme and went to great lengths to prepare to take her.”

Jayne Closs was targeted by suspected kidnapper Jake Patterson, who planned the murder of the teen’s parents, even shaving his head to avoid leaving forensic evidence at the crime scene, the police said.

Relying on what Mr Fitzgerald called “the will of a kid to survive”, Jayme escaped the house in the tiny town of Gordon where she had been held captive, about 100km north of her home in Barron. Her captor was not at home when she managed to flee, Mr Fitzgerald said. “Jayme is the hero in this case. She’s the one who helped us break this case,” he added.

Less than 15 minutes after Jayme’s rescue, Patterson was taken into custody after police pulled him over, based on the teen’s description of his vehicle.

Patterson, an unemployed resident of Gordon, is in custody after being charged with kidnapping and with murdering James and Denise Closs with a shotgun. Their bodies were found on Oct 15. REUTERS

buzz

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Huawei is under growing pressure in Europe amid rising concerns that Beijing could be using the company's equipment for spying. Washington wants its European allies to block Huawei from telecom networks amid a wider dispute over trade with China. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Europe split seen in Polish arrest of Huawei worker

Some states fear firm's equipment could be used by China for spying, others welcome its technology

WARSAW • As Poland added to the global scrutiny of Huawei Technologies with the arrest of a company employee and a local former security agent last Friday, the country's authorities also exposed the division in Europe over policy towards the Chinese technology giant. Huawei is facing increasing pressure across the European Union amid growing concerns that Beijing

could use the company's equipment for spying, something executives have denied. US President Donald Trump's administration has been pushing European allies to block Huawei from telecom networks amid a wider dispute over trade with China. While there is little to suggest any political motive, the Warsaw government is a staunch ally of the US and the country is a prototype of Trump-style nationalism and protectionism. Poland relies on the EU for money, but counts on the Americans for security, and US troops are stationed on its soil. Polish Interior Minister Joachim

Brudzinski said in a radio interview yesterday that the EU and Nato should find a common approach towards Huawei. "We want to have good, intensive and attractive relations with China; it's a huge market," Mr Brudzinski told Radio RMF FM. The dilemma is that Europe needs to develop its infrastructure somehow. Various countries, including Britain, France, Germany and Norway, have publicly raised concerns about using Huawei equipment for next-generation mobile networks. But others, like Spain, Portugal and Hungary, have been more wel-

coming of Chinese involvement. "Europe is facing a challenge when it comes to dealing with Huawei and it shows that the continent doesn't have the ability to be autonomous," said Dr Solange Ghernaoui, head of the Swiss Cybersecurity Advisory and Research Group. "Europe is either dependent on China or the United States." The Huawei employee detained in Poland is a Chinese citizen responsible for sales to public-sector clients, television news channel TVPInfo said last Friday. The other detained person is a former high-ranking official at Poland's Internal Security Agency who worked at mobile phone operator Orange Polska. The two will remain in custody for three months. Evidence shows that both men conducted espionage activities against Poland, Mr Stanislaw Zaryn, a spokesman for Poland's secret services chief, said in a statement. If convicted, they face up to 10 years in jail, Mr Zaryn said. China is seeking consular access for the Chinese citizen, Mr Wang Weijing, state media reported yesterday. The Chinese embassy in Poland has also asked Warsaw to "effectively ensure the legitimate rights and interests, and humanitarian and safe treatment of the person involved". The accusations add to Huawei's troubles of late as Western governments grow worried that the company's systems could be used by Chinese intelligence. Huawei yesterday said it has terminated Mr Wang's employment and that his alleged actions "have no relation to the company". The telecom equipment vendor also said Mr Wang "has brought Huawei into disrepute". Australia and New Zealand have banned Huawei equipment from the planned 5G networks of carriers in the countries and the head of British spy agency MI6 said last month the government had to decide whether to ban the company. Germany has said it is considering restricting Huawei's role in its future telecom infrastructure, while Czech President Milos Zeman said last Friday that China is preparing an economically damaging reprisal against his country after the authorities issued warnings about Huawei and the risks it poses to security. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, BLOOMBERG, REUTERS

Trudeau again chides China over detention of 2 Canadians

TORONTO • Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has chastised China again over the detention of two Canadians and defended his country's arrest of a senior Chinese executive at the request of the United States, which has sparked a Sino-Canadian diplomatic row. "It is unfortunate that China has arbitrarily and unfairly detained two Canadian citizens," he told reporters in the western Canadian city of Regina in Saskatchewan last Friday. The two Canadians were held last month after the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Huawei Technologies, in Vancouver on Dec 1, at the request of the US which has accused her of violating Iranian sanctions. The Canadian duo's arrest on grounds of national security has largely been seen as China's retaliation for the Meng case. In an article in the Ottawa-based Hill Times newspaper last Wednesday, Chinese Ambassador Lu Shaye said Canada's demands for the release of the two men reflected "double standards" born of "Western egotism and white supremacy". Mr Trudeau, asked about the comments, said Canada had simply acted in accordance with the rule of law. Meng has been released on bail and is living in her Vancouver home awaiting further extradition proceedings. "Canada is a country of the rule of law. This is something that we know and we value," Mr Trudeau said. "We have a justice system that is not subject to political interference." REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



RULE OF LAW

Canada is a country of the rule of law. This is something that we know and we value... We have a justice system that is not subject to political interference.



CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER JUSTIN TRUDEAU

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Sport



Date with Lin Dan
Loh Kean Yew has to beat Lin Dan in the final to win the Thai Masters.
A24



Above: The FFA's pioneer batch enjoyed the most success, with (clockwise from top) Shahril Ishak, Baihakki Khaizan, Ridhuan Muhammad and Hassan Sunny all going on to become national team regulars. THE NEW PAPER FILE PHOTO

Left: It was the opposite story for the 2010 Youth Olympic Games bronze medal-winning cohort which caught the eye and imagination. Nonetheless, none have been capped by Singapore to date. PHOTO: SPH-SYOGOC

FAS TO SHUT DOWN ITS ELITE ACADEMY

Move aimed at widening talent pipeline, with youth players to be spread out among SPL clubs

Wang Meng Meng

In a bid to refresh its youth system, the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) said yesterday that its elite FAS Football Academy (FFA) will be scrapped, with its players to continue their development at the various Singapore Premier League (SPL) clubs.

In response to queries from the Sunday Times, FAS deputy president Bernard Tan said in an e-mail: "While the FFA has produced key players for the national team in the past 18 years, much of our youth development efforts were concentrated on a fairly narrow pipeline of elite players coming through."

"After assessment and consultation with our stakeholders, we will be decentralising the youth development from this year on, and are in the process of ensuring that the players from the FFA teams will be able to continue their development in the sport."

Inaugurated on Aug 13, 2000, the FFA, previously called the National Football Academy (NFA), focused on grooming the best youngsters aged 15 to 18 in the country.

The FFA enjoyed success initially.

Its pioneer batch of graduates included forward Shahril Ishak, goalkeeper Hassan Sunny and centre-back Baihakki Khaizan, all whom became key players for the national team. Other cohort members like Juma'at Jantan, Hafiz Osman and Ridhuan Muhammad have also enjoyed lengthy professional careers.

The next batch produced Khairul Amri, who scored in the 2004 Asean Football Federation (AFF) Cup final at the age of 19. The cohort born in 1990 produced current Lions like Hariss Harun, Izwan Mahbud, Hafiz Sujad, Gabriel Quak, Izidin Shafiq, Afiq Yunus and Faritz Hameed.

But results have been dismal for the national age-group teams in recent years.

At the 2017 Asean Football Federation (AFF) U-15 Championship, Singapore were last in their group after five straight losses without scoring a single goal, including an embarrassing 2-0 defeat by Laos.

In 2015, the U-19s were bottom of their group at the AFF U-19 Championship, with one draw and three defeats, including a 4-0 hammering by Malaysia, and scoring just once in a 1-1 draw against Timor-Leste.

At the Asian Football Confederation

U-19 Championship qualifiers, the Cubs finished bottom of their group with three consecutive defeats, including a 4-2 loss to footballing outpost Mongolia.

Geylang International coach Noor Ali, who had previously coached the Eagles' youth players, said: "The FFA is a failure because it focused on just one group of players when there is so much talent around the country."

Hougang United coach Clement Teo, who coached St Gabriel's Secondary School's team where Hariss and Hafiz played under his watch, added: "Most of the FFA players are from the Singapore Sports School (SSP), which is something I strongly disagree with. They are not necessarily the best players around and there are many talented boys from other schools."

For example, in last year's FFA U-16 squad of 16 players, 11 were from the SSP. In the U-15s, 10 out of 25 were from the SSP, who won both the B and C Division titles in last year's National School Games.

But there are some who feel that the FFA had its positives. The mother of a recent graduate said: "My son enjoyed his time with the FFA. He trained with the same

WHAT A WASTE

I feel very sad to see what happened to the YOG boys, they have become the lost generation. (Jeffrey) Lightfoot, Hanafi (Akbar), Dhukhilan (Jeevamani)... there was so much talent.



KADIR YAHAYA, coach of the 2010 YOG team, lamenting the fate of his erstwhile charges under the FFA system.

WHAT A MISTAKE

The FFA is a failure because it focused on just one group of players when there is so much talent around the country.



NOORALI, Geylang International coach, is one person who will not be missing the FFA system.

group for years and that helped him get used to the playing style of his teammates.

"As a parent, we also have peace of mind letting our child go for training knowing he is with the national team. It is an honour to train with the best youngsters."

But the FFA could not produce the results and various reasons have been put forward. If Shahril and Co. had been the academy's success story, the cohort of boys born in 1995, better known as the team that won the bronze medal at the 2010 Youth Olympic Games (YOG), is at the other end of the spectrum.

Great things were expected from the side coached by Kadir Yahaya, but to date, none have been capped by the Lions although some have gone on to play professionally in the SPL, like Muhaimin Suhaimi (Hougang) and Ilyas Lee (Balestier Khalsa).

Kadir said: "I feel very sad to see what happened to the YOG boys, they have become the lost generation. (Jeffrey) Lightfoot, Hanafi (Akbar), Dhukhilan (Jeevamani)... there was so much talent."

"At least half of the squad could have gone on to play for the national team if they had stayed on the right path. They would have also become a very strong SEA Games team."

"It is long overdue that the FFA players are returning to the clubs and the FAS should help provide support and funding for the holistic development of our youngsters."

Lightfoot, the captain and centre-back of that team, felt that the squad could have been handled better to extract their full potential.

Now 23 and working for private academy JSIL as both a coach and a media and marketing manager, he said: "The YOG batch had a special bond but it was disappointing how it turned out. Within a couple of years, we had four to five different coaches, each coach wanted to implement his own way of playing and had a different style of coaching."

"We got along well with the coaches but it was tough for us young boys to keep adapting. We learnt the most from Kadir and he could have built on the YOG success."

A parent of an FFA player added: "The coaches change every year, there is no continuity as every coach has his own playing style and training method."

"One year, my son's coach focused on short passes and in the next year, the coach was more direct and focused on fitness. Also, some coaches were very caring while others did not interact much with them outside of training hours. My boy had to adapt all over again every year."

There were other reasons for the dismal results suffered by the Cubs. According to Kadir, the early batches of trainees received benefits like daily allowances, bursaries, bus-stamp reimbursements, training grants, boots allowances and tuition. The practice was later discontinued.

The mother of the recent FFA graduate confirmed that apart from a \$5 allowance for every training session, her son did not receive any other benefits.

Kadir explained that the notion is not mercenary, saying: "If you want to entice players to play, they need to feel fully supported, they need to feel that they are getting help to chase the dream."

But the FFA is now past and the FAS wants to engage the fraternity to revive its development pipeline.

Tan said: "Moving forward, we will be working closely with the SPL clubs, schools and academies to widen the base of elite players for selection towards the age-group national teams."

"We will also develop and administer standards for youth development, and most importantly, intensify our efforts to scout talented players for the national teams."

meng@sph.com.sg

four-digit draw

Jan 12 2019

First 2872

Second 3818

Third 4510

STARTERS

0726 1448 3489

4401 5176 6196

6590 7609 8307

9234

CONSOLATIONS

0986 1000 3452

3720 4467 5817

6774 6775 8410

9535

Asian Cup 2019

Iran and Iraq qualify for last 16 with easy wins

ABU DHABI • Carlos Queiroz has warned that Iran can only get better, after Sardar Azmoun struck twice in the 2-0 win over Vietnam yesterday to ensure they qualified for the last 16 of the Asian Cup.

Iraq joined them in the knockout stages by beating Yemen 3-0 in Sharjah before the two rivals, both on six points, clash on Wednesday to determine the Group D winners.

"The two teams have played very well, fought hard," said coach Queiroz after the match with Asean champions Vietnam, who lost 3-2 to Iraq in their opener.

"However, I believe we can play stronger. We played with only 60 to 70 per cent of our ability."

"But the result is very good. I predicted from the start that Vietnam are a difficult team and it is not easy

to score many goals into their net."

Iran, looking for their fourth title and their first since 1976, could have scored four or five but for some poor finishing in Abu Dhabi. Saman Ghoddos and Mehdi Taremi went close, before Azmoun rose to head home a Ghoddos cross after 38 minutes.

The Rubin Kazan forward then lashed in his third goal of the tour-

namment from the edge of the box 20 minutes from time to give Iran a ninth successive first-round victory dating back to 2007. Iran, joint-favourites with South Korea for the Cup, crushed war-torn Yemen 5-0 in their opener.

Queiroz said: "The next few matches are always important. Now, we will really look forward to that match with Iraq."

In Group C, South Korea and China ensured their places in the last 16 on Friday after beating Kyrgyzstan 1-0 and the Philippines 3-0 respectively. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ASIAN CUP

North Korea v Qatar: Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208, 6.50pm
Oman v Japan: 9.20pm
Turkmenistan v Uzbekistan: 11.50pm

TEENAGER SINKS MIGHTY GUNNERS

Rice’s goal is Hammer blow for an Ozil-less Arsenal, whose winless run stretches to five

| ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| YESTERDAY | |
| Burnley 2 Fulham 1 | |
| Brighton 0 Liverpool 1 | |
| Cardiff 0 Huddersfield 0 | |
| Crystal Palace 1 Watford 2 | |
| Leicester 1 Southampton 2 | |
| West Ham 1 Arsenal 0 | |
| Chelsea v Newcastle | |
| Late kick-off | |
| TODAY | |
| Everton v Bournemouth | |
| Ch102 & Ch227, 10.15pm | |
| Tottenham v Man United | |
| Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub | |
| Ch227, tomorrow, 12.30am | |
| TOMORROW | |
| Man City v Wolves | |
| Ch102 & Ch227, Tuesday, 4am | |

LONDON • After all the fuss over Marko Arnautovic’s future, the limelight belonged to a local lad who places his love of the game above the riches that are surely going to come his way.

The script seemed to demand an audacious performance from Arnautovic but instead the day belonged to Declan Rice, who sealed West Ham’s 1-0 Premier League win over Arsenal with his first goal for the club.

The midfielder, who turns 20 tomorrow, also earned his side a deserved first home victory over the Gunners in 13 years after scoring in the 48th minute yesterday.

Unsurprisingly, he spoke excitedly about his “special moment” after the match, telling Sky Sports: “I can’t put it into words. I was in the box, I took it on, it went in the top corner and we beat Arsenal.”

He played like a seasoned professional against Arsenal, frustrating Unai Emery’s side time and again with a series of well-timed interventions in defensive midfield, and displayed his outstanding technique when he settled a tight encounter with a fine shot.

“Declan Rice is improving. In the future he will be a top, top player,” said West Ham manager Manuel Pellegrini.

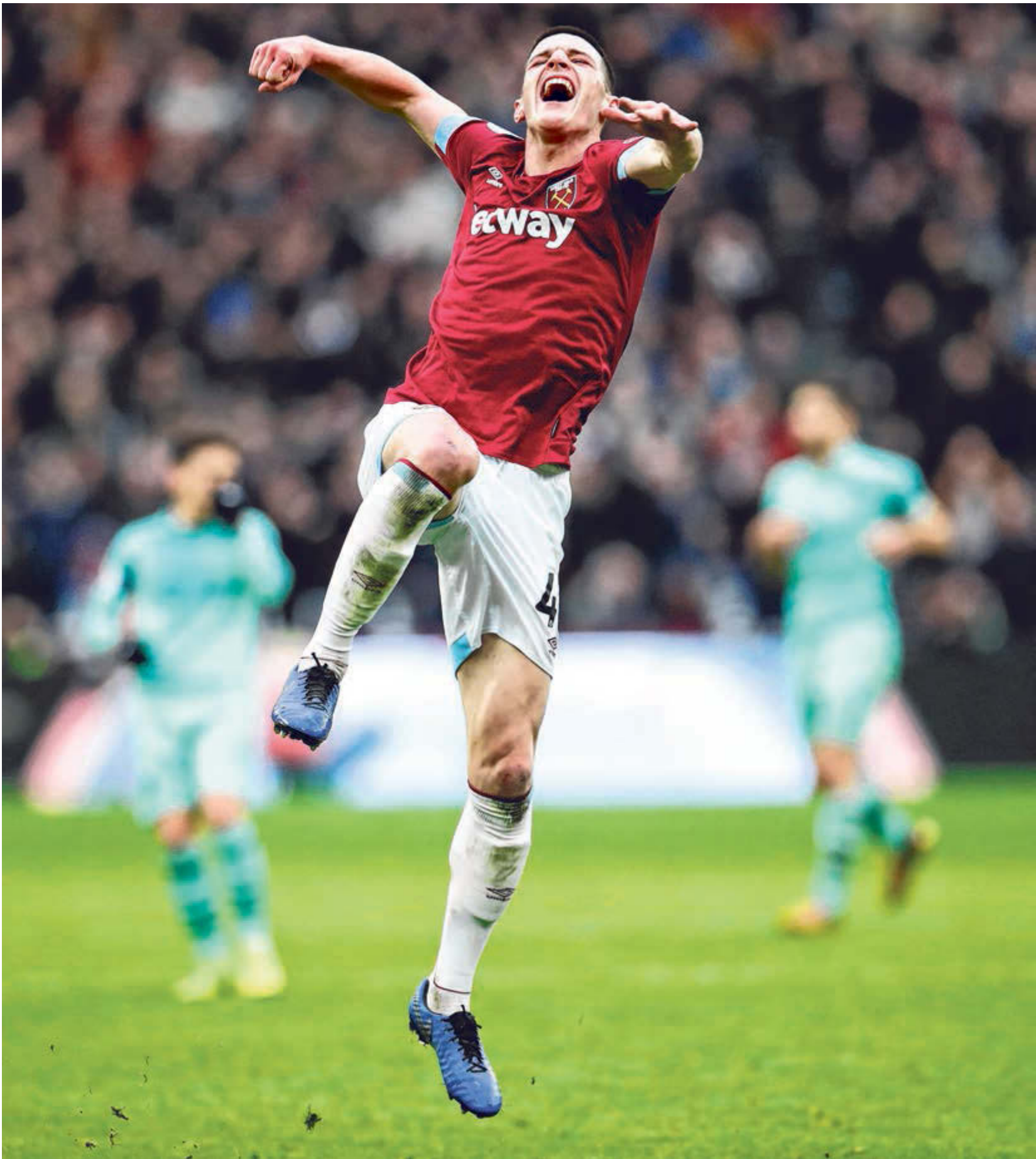
“I was pleased with the consistency of the team. We didn’t allow Arsenal to create chances. We played with the mentality of a big team. We have to try to work and play in the same way all the time.”

Awkward financial realities dominated the conversation before the London derby.

While it was disconcerting for Arsenal’s fans to hear Emery say he can only afford to make loan signings this month, West Ham have been confronted by Arnautovic’s desire to accept a lucrative offer from an unidentified Chinese club.

Ever the showman, Arnautovic had bleached his hair for the occasion. Yet this was a subdued performance from the Austrian striker and the greater threat emanated from Emery’s forwards during the early stages.

But the visitors faded after a bright start and it was impossible not to feel that Arsenal have got themselves into an unenviable bind when it comes to their playmaker Mesut Ozil, who did not



West Ham United’s Declan Rice, who turns 20 tomorrow, jumps for joy after the final whistle at the London Stadium yesterday. His 48th-minute goal earned the Hammers a thoroughly deserved 1-0 win over the Gunners. It was West Ham’s first home victory over Arsenal in 13 years. PHOTO: REUTERS

2 Points Arsenal have taken from their five-match winless run in the Premier League, with two draws and three losses.

even merit a place on the bench.

Emery made his feelings clear about Ozil before kick-off, insisting that the German’s absence from yet another awkward away assignment was a tactical decision, but it is an unsatisfactory situation from the club’s perspective.

They are crying out for elite talents and their biggest earner, a player on £350,000 (\$\$608,000) a week, is not rated by his manager.

For all of Ozil’s inconsistencies,

the Gunners needed a player of his class and invention, as former Arsenal midfielder Samir Nasri duly demonstrated.

The 31-year-old, rebuilding his career at West Ham after a doping ban, was at the heart of much of the Hammers’ best work on his Premier League debut for the club.

It was the Frenchman’s neat lay-off that allowed Rice the space to curl a superb shot past Bernd Leno.

Arsenal have now lost three of their last four away matches in the league and Emery admitted it is a worry, with sixth-placed Manchester United just three points behind before their match at Tottenham Hotspur today.

“It is a concern. We need to be competitive both home and away. Away, we are not taking the results we want,” the Spaniard said.

“If we can be better in the 90 minutes – competitive and quality – we can do it.”

THE GUARDIAN, REUTERS

Oh Gross, Reds nick it



Mohamed Salah putting away the 50th-minute penalty he earned at Brighton yesterday after being hacked down by midfielder Pascal Gross. It earned the Premier League leaders their first win this year, after setbacks at champions Manchester City in the league and at Wolverhampton in the FA Cup third round. The Reds have 57 points to extend their lead to seven points over City, who host Wolves tomorrow. PHOTO: REUTERS

HeartOfFootball

Sit back, watch gifted players and their inspiring managers



Rob Hughes

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer steps out of mid-season training in Dubai to a Wembley Stadium meeting today with the man touted as the favourite to take his job at Manchester United.

And, unlike his melancholic predecessor, Solskjaer manages to face even that suggestion with a smile.

“The speculation,” he says, “is there for a reason. He (Spurs’ manager Mauricio Pochettino) has done a very good job. But it’s not my job to rate different managers.”

Indeed, the task that Ole has taken to with 100 per cent success is to get United winning again. To make them play like Red Devils again, like they used to do under Alex Ferguson, and before that under Matt Busby.

Spurs at Wembley are not insurmountable opponents. Wolverhampton Wanderers won 3-1 there on Dec 29.

That was an aberration, a hiatus in a run of Tottenham victories that included a 6-2 away win at Everton, a 7-0 FA Cup thrashing of Tranmere and a 5-0 home victory over Bournemouth.

United, however, have beaten

every opponent since Solskjaer took over at Christmas. Critics say it’s been an easy start, against nobody of great threat or significance since Ole was beckoned over from Norway to pick up the reins at the club where he was a veritable goal-thief in his playing days.

The “Baby Faced Assassin” of that era is a slightly greying 45-year-old now. But, bless him, Solskjaer still exudes the effervescence of a man who feels privileged in his post – a manager whose philosophy could not be further removed from the joyless paranoia of Jose Mourinho.

The latter is occupying TV studios, adding to his £15 million (\$\$26 million) pay-off to leave Old Trafford by pontificating on other men’s teams.

Mourinho’s specialisation has changed from accumulating trophies to banking enormous pay-offs for failure on a three-year recurring cycle from Real Madrid, Chelsea and United.

The game is about players, yet Mourinho’s three-card trick is to claim the credit when they win, and blame the players when they lose.

Solskjaer’s breath of fresh air has been, in his own words, to remind players that United’s way is an attractive, attacking philosophy. And that they, Paul Pogba, Marcus Rashford, Anthony Martial (even the previously dormant Alexis Sanchez) are only United players if they put in performances, week after week, that honour the traditions that made United a byword for exciting football in the world.

Ole’s emphasis on restoring that pride, that ethic, that enjoyment in Rashford in particular is thrilling to behold. Here is a talent, incredibly fast and strikingly intuitive who could blossom into not just a United great but also a real threat to

So tonight at Wembley is a vital game beyond league points. Solskjaer could eclipse Busby’s record start. Pochettino might emphasise why United want him.

England’s (and Tottenham’s) Mr Goals, Harry Kane.

For as long as Spurs have Kane, surrounded by Christian Eriksen, Son Heung-min and Dele Alli, there is reason for Pochettino to stay. Yet Tottenham are entering their own “Arsenal phase” through which the new White Hart Lane, which will not now be ready until March at the earliest, sucks out hundreds of millions from the team project.

Part of what Pochettino has created in his five years at Tottenham has been nurturing and moulding youth into a team that play attractive football at the top end of the EPL.

United would love that. Indeed, that is the golden thread throughout their history – a devilish attitude to trust themselves to outscore anyone and everyone.

It was established right after World War II when the club were rebuilt by Busby. In his first five games, in 1946, Busby won against Grimsby, Chelsea, Charlton, Liverpool and Middlesbrough.

Nobody (not even Ferguson) replicated that until Solskjaer’s arrival. Agreed, Cardiff,

Huddersfield, Bournemouth, Newcastle and Reading are all teams United should beat.

But Mourinho’s Red Devils were too cautious, too fearful to overrun anybody. Solskjaer restored some trust and licence to thrill.

The five days in Dubai were his time to train the players hard, to look into their eyes, and to remind them why they are there.

“We wanted to build cohesion,” Solskjaer explained, “to lay down a few principles about pace and power.”

In this transfer window, or more likely the next, United will spend to reshape the squad. Tottenham must balance stadium costs against the inevitable offers for Eriksen and others whose departures would unravel the “project” that keeps Pochettino at the club.

So tonight at Wembley is a vital game beyond league points. Solskjaer could eclipse Busby’s record start. Pochettino might emphasise why United want him.

Or we could do as we are meant to do and judge the performance of hugely gifted players.

stsports@sph.com.sg

BigMatch

POCHETTINO LOOKING ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Spurs manager sanguine about club's future despite stadium delay, transfer restrictions

Sazali Abdul Aziz
In London

Some pundits have suggested that Tottenham Hotspur have put off a return to White Hart Lane from their temporary home at Wembley Stadium because they are in the thick of the Premier League title race, but Mauricio Pochettino has pooh-poohed the notion.

Instead, the manager insisted that he would have been happy to play today's opponents, Manchester United, at their newly refurbished ground if it were possible.

When asked why at Friday's pre-game press conference, he said: "Because I'm a positive person.

"If you are a person who is scared to go outside your comfort zone, it will be difficult to find something different.

"I like to switch the light off, put myself in difficult situations, and take myself out of my comfort zone. That's why I am here."

It would indeed take a positive man to embrace the challenge of transforming Spurs into one of Europe's elite clubs, given the club's reluctance to invest in players.

Tottenham have had a net spend of less than £50 million (\$\$87 million) since Pochettino took charge – roughly a 10th of that spent by champions Manchester City, who sit one rung and two points above them in the league table.

And last summer, Spurs rather infamously became the first club in the Premier League not to purchase a single player in the transfer window, and that policy looks like it will continue in this window too.

Given the frustrations of the job, Pochettino's sunny disposition is remarkable – and unexpected.

When Spurs media officer Simon Felstein asked a posse of visiting South-east Asian journalists – including the Sunday Times, in London courtesy of Spurs' global principal partner AIA – to raise their hands for the next question, Pochettino playfully raised his and said: "Can I ask a question to myself?"

He even showed the press a picture of his beloved pooch Sansa, a Rhodesian Ridgeback, which he likened to Spurs attacking midfielder Christian Eriksen and regaled reporters with a tale of how he sneaked into the President's Box at the Nou Camp to catch the 1999 Champions League final between United and Bayern Munich.

But those who track his history would know that it is not all laughter and light with Pochettino. After all, this is the same man who was a snarling, tough-as-nails defender that racked up 13 red cards in just over 250 games across 10 seasons with Spanish club Espanyol.

When ST asked if there was a difference between Pochettino the fierce competitor and Pochettino the man, he jokingly winced and

turned to his trusted assistant, Jesus Perez.

"I am a little bit different, no, Jesus? Same?," he said with a smile. "I don't know. I am more serious when playing, or on the touchline."

"Here, in life, I smile more... In principle, I think I am similar (as a player)."

It is this steel – which he has also imbued in Spurs, who before his arrival were plagued by a chronic lack of mental fortitude – that has seen him guide the Londoners to a top-three finish in the league in each of the last three seasons despite their limited resources. This season, they are still involved in the Premier League, FA Cup, League Cup and Champions League.

Yet, for all the remarkable work he has done with Spurs, the fact remains that he has yet to win any silverware as a manager.

When ST asked if this is a fact that gnaws at him, he shook his head and said: "No, it doesn't bother me."

"We are so focused on trying to provide our fans a title, because it would be fantastic."

Last May, he signed a five-year contract extension to stay at the club until 2023, and the timing was uncanny. The ink had barely dried on his deal when Zinedine Zidane resigned as Real Madrid manager following the club's third Champions League triumph on the trot, and Pochettino was heavily touted as the Spanish giants' first choice to succeed the Frenchman.

This term, Pochettino is being tipped as United's first choice to replace Jose Mourinho as the Red Devils' permanent manager. British me-

dia have billed today's match as an "audition" for the Argentinian and his opposite number, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

Moving to a club of United's stature would give Pochettino access to a level of resources he has not had since joining the London club in 2014, although the manager declared a few days ago that he hoped to remain with Tottenham for the next 20 years.

While he has sent mixed messages on his future, the Argentinian was clear on what direction Spurs should take, urging them to "operate in a different way" if they are to end their 10-year trophy drought.

He clarified that this did not necessarily mean buying players but taking a leap in ambition across all fronts to "refresh the project" ahead of the club's move to their new 62,062-seater stadium – which has been delayed twice and is now due in March.

"What is true in the period we are in is to settle the (groundwork) and the possibility for the future to have all the tools to try and win and be a realistic contender."

"Today the club (are) doing a fantastic job, in creating a massive training ground and the new stadium. That doesn't mean we are not trying to win now, because we will try, of course."

msazali@sph.com.sg

SEE ALSO A27

TOTTENHAM V MAN UNITED

Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, tomorrow, 12.30am



WELCOMING NEW CHALLENGES

If you are a person who is scared to go outside your comfort zone, it will be difficult to find something different. I like to switch the light off, put myself in difficult situations.



MAURICIO POCHETTINO, Tottenham manager, insists that he thrives under trying, uncertain conditions.

HERE FOR THE LONG RUN

What is true in the period we are in is to settle the (groundwork)... for the future to have all the tools to be a realistic contender. Today the club (are) doing a fantastic job, in creating a massive training ground and the new stadium.



POCHETTINO, on Spurs' plan for long-term success.

Above: Spurs' move to their new 62,062-seater stadium has been delayed twice and is now due in March. Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino pooh-poohed the notion that the latest delay was meant to accommodate their title chase. PHOTO: REUTERS

Below: Pochettino's sunny disposition and playful mood, when The Sunday Times spoke to him in London on Friday, belied the apparent frustrations that come with the Spurs job. PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID ASH



United can exploit tired Spurs, says Berbatov

LONDON • Manchester United must be ready to exploit any fatigue in the Tottenham Hotspur ranks when they meet in what former Bulgarian striker Dimitar Berbatov says is a "special" Premier League fixture at Wembley today.

United enjoyed a training break in Dubai last week while Tottenham's players were in action on Tuesday in an intense League Cup semi-final, first leg against London rivals Chelsea, grafting to a 1-0 win.

Tottenham's squad are also stretched by injuries and Berbatov says a buoyant United could pose a

threat to Mauricio Pochettino's men.

"There may well be a bit of tiredness in the group and United need to use that to their advantage," the 37-year-old, who played for United and Spurs, said in an interview with Betfair.

"If they're clever and keep the ball, speeding up the game when possible and exploiting any space, they have a chance to defeat Tottenham. Both teams need to be clever."

Berbatov spent two seasons at Tottenham, scoring 27 league goals, before joining United in 2008, net-

ting 48 league goals in his four seasons at Old Trafford.

He will be at Wembley today as Tottenham, 10 points above United in third place, look to inflict a first defeat on United since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer took charge on an interim basis after Jose Mourinho's sacking.

"I'm going as a fan and I am really looking forward to seeing something special," Berbatov said.

"Given (United's) form, I'm surprised that the odds are so far apart with Spurs strong favourites."

"United have played so well under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, winning

all five games across the league and FA Cup. They have entertained us and look so confident."

With both sides in rich attacking form – Tottenham have netted 15 times in their last four league games and United 14 – Berbatov expects a high-scoring game.

"A draw wouldn't be helpful for anyone here," he added. "Spurs need to stay close to the top of the table, and United fighting for that fourth spot."

"Ultimately, I do think we'll see goals for both sides. There's so much attacking quality in both

sides – Harry Kane, Anthony Martial, players who can score from nothing – that it's hard to see a clean sheet for either side."

While Solskjaer's flying start has raised the possibility of him getting the United job full-time, Berbatov said a better time to judge him might be after the Spurs game.

"Ole's made a fine start at Old Trafford," he said. "But with all due respect to the teams they've played, this is their first serious test."

"Spurs are a great barometer of how far United have come under Ole." REUTERS

GOALS GALORE

There's so much attacking quality in both sides – Harry Kane, Anthony Martial, players who can score from nothing – that it's hard to see a clean sheet for either side.



DIMITAR BERBATOV, former Spurs and United player, on tonight's match.

SportsWorld

Fabregas moves from Chelsea to Monaco

PARIS • Spanish midfielder Cesc Fabregas has completed his move to French Ligue 1 team Monaco from Chelsea, the football clubs said on Friday.

The 31-year-old, who played for Arsenal from 2003-11 and Chelsea from 2014, will be reunited with former Arsenal teammate Thierry Henry, who is now the Monaco coach. REUTERS

J-League's Miura, 51, set for 34th season

TOKYO • Former Japan striker Kazuyoshi Miura, who turns 52 next month, has extended his record as the J-League's oldest player after renewing his contract with Yokohama FC, the club announced on Friday.

The veteran footballer, admirably nicknamed "King Kazu" for his spirited on-field style, will kick off his 34th career season this year, the second division club said. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Kvitova beats Barty for 2nd Sydney title

SYDNEY • Petra Kvitova outlasted Ashleigh Barty in a final-set tiebreak to win the Sydney International for the second time yesterday.

The Czech 2015 champion and fifth seed fought back from dropping the first set and an early break in the final set to beat the unseeded Australian 1-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7-3) in 2hr 19min. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Reavie soars with three eagles on par-4s

LOS ANGELES • Chez Reavie made history with three eagles on par-four holes during the second round of the Sony Open on Friday.

According to the PGA Tour, no golfer had managed the feat since accurate records of such occurrences began in 1983. Reavie carded a five-under 65 for a 10-under 130 total. He trailed leader Matt Kuchar (63) by four shots. REUTERS

Two new mixed events for 2019 World Relays

NEW YORK • A mixed shuttle hurdles race is one of two new mixed events introduced to the programme for this year's IAAF World Relays in Yokohama, the International Association of Athletics Federations said on Friday.

The addition of a mixed 2x2x400m relay and mixed shuttle hurdles relay means there will be three men's, three women's and three mixed events at the May 11-12 meet. REUTERS

Australian Open 2019

SERENA FAVOURITE FOR 24TH SLAM TITLE

Her US Open victor Osaka is next fancied, indicating a lack of serious opponents

MELBOURNE • Serena Williams is hot favourite to repeat her 2017 Australian Open win and claim a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title with her rivals, including defending champion Caroline Wozniacki, battling health issues and poor form.

The American won her 23rd title and seventh at Melbourne Park while eight weeks pregnant two years ago, and now attempts to match Margaret Court's mark of 24 major singles crowns.

The 37-year-old enters the tournament ranked 16th in the world but has such immense quality that numbers mean little to her, despite fresh memories of her meltdown in losing last September's US Open final to Naomi Osaka.

She missed her first chance to match Court when she lost last year's Wimbledon final to Angelique Kerber, and said ahead of the Australian Open that she was taking nothing for granted.

"It's something that I clearly want but I have to be able to get there and beat a lot of good players to get it," said the American, who will start against unseeded German Tatjana Maria on Tuesday.

She said she had put the controversial final at Flushing Meadows behind her and intended to "move on to bigger and better things". Then, she had raged against umpire Carlos Ramos, who imposed three code violations, with the final one resulting in the loss of a game.

Eighteen-time Grand Slam winner Chris Evert believes that Williams is well-poised to win the Australian Open this year.

"She seems fitter than last year," said Evert, an ESPN tennis analyst. "The scary thought looking at the women, they have to be thinking at this point, 'Gosh, she was 60, 70 per cent last year reaching two finals, and now she seems fitter, leaner, she's moving better.'"

Bookmakers in Australia have also installed Williams as a short-priced favourite for the title.

While her US Open conqueror Osaka is second favourite, it points to a lack of serious rivals for Williams among the established players. The 21-year-old world No. 4 is the leading light for the next generation but is still inexperienced.

Wozniacki, ranked third, started last season by winning her first Slam in Melbourne and returning to world No. 1, but ended it in October with the bombshell announcement that she had been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis.

The 28-year-old Dane insists she can manage the debilitating autoimmune condition, which sometimes leaves her so exhausted she cannot raise her arms above her head. Whether she can cope with the gruelling two-week slog of a Grand Slam remains to be seen.

World No. 1 Simona Halep of Ro-



mania comes into the tournament under a fitness cloud after a back injury curtailed her 2018 season.

Maria Sharapova also retired at the Shenzhen Open due to a thigh injury earlier this month. The Russian has failed to impress since returning from a doping ban and now ranked 30th, is looking some way from the player who won five Grand Slams.

Two-time Major champion and ex-No. 1 Garbine Muguruza also had an injury-blighted 2018 which saw her drop out of the top 10.

But Aryna Sabalenka, 20, from Belarus has zoomed up the rankings from 73rd at the start of last year to No. 11 on the back of wins in New Haven and Wuhan, and is a dark horse to emulate Osaka.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, WASHINGTON POST

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Day 1: Singtel TV Ch114 & Ch115, StarHub Ch208 & 209, tomorrow, 8am & 4pm

FEAR FACTOR

The scary thought looking at the women, they have to be thinking at this point, 'Gosh, she was 60, 70 per cent last year reaching two finals, and now she seems fitter, leaner, she's moving better.'



CHRIS EVERT, 18-time Grand Slam winner and ESPN tennis analyst, on Serena Williams.

Serena Williams (at a practice session at the Margaret Court Arena in Melbourne yesterday) will open her Australian Open campaign against unseeded German Tatjana Maria on Tuesday. She seems fitter and leaner than last year, while her established rivals seem to have health issues. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Women to watch

SIMONA HALEP, 27 (ROM)

World ranking: 1
Grand Slams: 1

Best Australian Open result: Final (2018)

She bounced back from losing to Caroline Wozniacki in Melbourne 12 months ago to claim her maiden Slam at the French Open and climb back to No. 1, despite a nagging back injury that forced her to miss the WTA Finals in Singapore. The top seed is without a coach, after long-time Australian mentor Darren Cahill stepped down for family reasons.

Biggest weapon: Despite her short stature, Halep's speed and athleticism allow her to cover the court quickly and surprise opponents with winners even when she is on the back foot.

Biggest weakness: She lacks the physical strength of her biggest rivals and has a reputation for imploding under the spotlight, despite winning her first Major.

ANGELIQUE KERBER, 30 (GER)

World ranking: 2
Grand Slams: 3

Best Australian Open result: Champion (2016)

The Wimbledon champion turns 31 on Friday and is tipped to unveil a more aggressive approach under new coach Rainer Schuttler. He will add more "daring" to the 2016 Australian Open champion's game, said the German Tennis Association's Barbara Rittner, who helped develop Kerber as a teenager.

Biggest weapon: A traditional baseliner and at her most comfortable overpowering opponents from the back. She can dominate rallies with her forehand and her defensive game is one of the best on the circuit.

Biggest weakness: Opponents will hope to capitalise on her service game.

NAOMI OSAKA, 21 (JPN)

World ranking: 4
Grand Slams: 1

Best Australian Open result: 4th round (2018)

The 21-year-old US Open champion has the opportunity to demonstrate she can withstand the spotlight of being the new standard-bearer for tennis in Japan, Asia and the next generation of women. She arrives as second favourite with the bookies behind Williams, and has said she does not feel any pressure to perform.

Biggest weapon: A formidable blend of power and accuracy helps Osaka hit winners from any part of the court. The Japanese also has the endurance to go the distance against the big guns.

Biggest weakness: Despite her US Open victory, she is still short of experience on the big stage and is uncomfortable at the net.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

தமிழ்மூரசு

Lost in translation?

Tamil Murasu provides error-free translation from English to Tamil

Proof reading available

Please call: Mrs Muthu 6319 4062
email: cmuthu@sph.com.sg

THE STRAITS TIMES SINGAPOREAN OF THE YEAR 2018

PRESENTED BY **UBS**

The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year award, organised in partnership with UBS for the fourth year running, seeks to honour the positive impact made by Singaporeans and celebrate the triumph of human spirit

Nizar Mohamed Shariff and Free Food For All

In 2014, Nizar Mohamed Shariff set up Free Food For All, a charity that provides free cooked meals for the needy. The charity cooks up to 100,000 meals a year for 3,000 elderly or low-income residents living in rental flats.

Read about the other finalists at str.sg/soty2018 and tell us who should be the Singaporean of the Year 2018 by Jan 15, 6pm

Cast your vote now at str.sg/soty18vote

Terms and conditions apply

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS

| Event | Home | Away | Timing | Venue |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Sun, 13 Jan 2019 | | | | |
| A League | Sydney FC | Adelaide | 3.00pm | LW |
| A League | Perth Glory | Western Sydney | 5.00pm | LW |
| Asian Cup | Korea DPR | Qatar | 7.00pm | LW / SB |
| Spanish League | Atletico Madrid | Levante | 7.00pm | LW / SB |
| Asian Cup | Oman | Japan | 9.30pm | LW / SB |
| Italian Cup | Torino | Fiorentina | 10.00pm | LW / SB |
| English Premier | Everton | Bournemouth | 10.15pm | LW / SB |
| Spanish League | Athletic Bilbao | Sevilla | 11.15pm | LW / SB |
| Mon, 14 Jan 2019 | | | | |
| Asian Cup | Turkmenistan | Uzbekistan | 12.00am | LW / SB |
| English Premier | Tottenham | Manchester Utd | 12.30am | LW / SB |
| Italian Cup | Inter | Benevento SRL | 1.00am | LW / SB |
| Spanish League | Barcelona | Eibar | 1.30am | LW / SB |
| Italian Cup | Napoli | Sassuolo | 3.45am | LW |
| Spanish League | Real Betis | Real Madrid | 3.45am | LW |

Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.

LOTTERY

TOTO Fri, 11 Jan 2019 Draw No. 3439/2019

Group 1 Prize: \$5,000,000
No Winner

Draw No. 3440/2019
Next Draw Mon, 14 Jan 2019
Group 1 Prize **\$8,600,000** est.
6.30pm
Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994

No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize.
LW: LiveWire (MBS) & LiveWire (RWS) (21 years and above)
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SB: SportsBuzz@Core (21 years and above)
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LOH TO MEET LIN DAN IN FINAL

Ex-shuttler Susilo says Singaporean can upset the Chinese legend, who is not in top form

Nicole Chia

Today, 21-year-old Singaporean Loh Kean Yew faces the biggest match of his career and his sternest challenge yet – badminton legend Lin Dan in the final of the Princess Sirivannavari Thailand Masters in Bangkok.

The world No. 125 came back to upset 30th-ranked Brice Leverdez of France 14-21, 21-10, 21-14 in the semi-final yesterday, while top seed Lin tamed compatriot Lu Guangzu 21-11, 6-21, 21-18.

The fifth-tier US\$150,000 (S\$203,000) event on the Badminton World Federation's world tour is four rungs below its top-tiered US\$1.5 million season finale.

The winner's cheque of US\$11,250 will literally be hard-earned for Loh, who is taking a calm approach against the winner of two Olympic golds and five world titles.

"He is one of the best badminton players of all time, so I am the underdog and have nothing to lose," said Loh.

"I can't get too excited. I need to

maintain (my) composure and treat it like any other match and stay focused."

Former Singapore shuttler Ronald Susilo, who famously upset Lin at the 2004 Olympic Games, believes Loh can pull off an upset today.

He noted that Lin, now world No. 13, has been playing rubber games in all his four rounds, and believes that the 35-year-old is not in top form and would be further tired out by those deciders.

"My advice is to be patient and (there is) no need to attack all the time. Loh definitely has a very good chance to win," he added.

Loh believes his professional stint at Langhoj Badminton Club, which ends this month, has contrib-

uted to his growth as a player and person, evidenced by the breakthrough achieved in the first tournament of the year.

Last October, the Singapore Badminton Association and Singapore Sports School paved the way for Loh and Yeo Jia Min, whose stint with AB Aarhus ended last month, to be contracted to Danish clubs.

"I've learnt different playing styles and trained with different (types) of players," he said, adding that he is more consistent in training after finishing national service and also more focused.

For instance, he could not adapt well to the draught in the first game yesterday but managed to attack more in the second.

"In the third game, I just kept reminding myself to stay focused and not make simple errors," he added.

Yeo, 19, reached the quarter-finals of a fifth-tier event for the first time but fell to Indonesia's world No. 33 Fitriani Fitriani on Friday.

Said world No. 53 Yeo: "From this competition, I've seen how certain things I've prepared for work well... (namely) physical conditioning and footwork, which affect my shots and game play."

nicole@sph.com.sg



Golden State Warriors guard Klay Thompson knocked down three straight three-pointers in the first 70 seconds of the game against the Chicago Bulls. His 30 points helped the Warriors power to a 146-109 beatdown of Chicago at the Oracle Arena on Friday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Warriors bully hapless Bulls again

OAKLAND (California) • The Chicago Bulls should have known what was to come when they fell to a franchise-worst 43-17 first quarter against the Golden State Warriors on Friday night.

The signs were plain to see. They were down 44-28 in the same period in their previous meeting and went on to lose 149-124.

This time, Klay Thompson buried three straight three-pointers in the first 70 seconds of the National Basketball Association (NBA) game as the Warriors ran away to a 146-109 victory at the Oracle Arena.

The win capped one of the highest-scoring, season-series sweeps ever. No team had before scored 149 and 146 points in a two-game season series against the Bulls.

Thompson, who broke the NBA record with 14 threes in the reverse fixture en route to 52 points, hit seven of 11 from beyond the arc to claim a game-high 30 points.

"That was incredible," Golden State coach Steve Kerr said of the guard. "Unbelievable start for him. It was a great first quarter, obviously set the tone."

The Warriors (28-14) scored 14 of the game's first 16 points and never

looked back, going up 76-55 at halftime before coasting home for their third consecutive win.

Stephen Curry backed Thompson with 28 points and a game-high eight assists for the Warriors, and Kevin Durant added 22 points.

Curry's third of five three-pointers in the game was the 2,283rd of his career, moving him past Jason Terry for third on the NBA all-time list behind Ray Allen (2,973) and Reggie Miller (2,560).

Curry said: "They are people I looked up to. Obviously I want to catch them. I respect what guys have done before."

Thompson shot 10 for 18 overall, leading the Warriors to a 57.6 per cent shooting performance.

Back-ups Quinn Cook (15 points), Jordan Bell (13) and Marcus Derrickson (10) also scored in double figures as Golden State beat the Bulls for the fourth straight time.

Zach LaVine had a team-high 29 points for the Bulls (10-32), who were playing the second of a five-game Western trip. Bobby Portis added 16 points and Antonio Blakeney 12 for Chicago, who lost their sixth game in a row.

REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Let's Play! touche and go



Pek Dewei (left), 30, and Oh Fu Quan, 28, trying out wheelchair fencing, among other activities, at Let's Play! At Passion Wave@Marina Bay. About 500 attended the first in a series of carnivals for people of all abilities that aims to promote a more inclusive community. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Weekly tweetbits



HOT SHOT

"#GrandpaLewis"

F1 world champion Lewis Hamilton offers a glimpse of himself as a retired pensioner in a get-up for an advertisement.



THROWBACK

"Watched our first action packed NBA game!! Warriors vs Wizards. What a treat with Steph Curry scoring more than 50 points in 3 quarters. #throwfarfarback #oraclearena #nba" Swimmer Yip Pin Xiu fits in an NBA game while on holiday in the United States.



MEME-ORABLE

When Manchester City went 4-0 up against Burton inside 37 minutes... The English champions added five more goals for good measure, ahead of the second leg of their League Cup semi-final against the third-tier team.



CAUGHT ON CAMERA

"Paul Pogba controlling the ball backwards mid interview is probably the best thing you'll see today. Too good." WATCH: goo.gl/Zi5xjC

PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM/YIPPINXIU, LEWISHAMILTON, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, TWITTER/ODDSBIBLE, MANUTD

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL

ABL Formosa Dreamers v Alab Pilipinas (StarHub Ch201, 3pm), Spore Slingers v Mono Vampire (OCBC Arena, 4pm), Saigon Heat v HK Eastern (6pm), CLS Knights Indonesia v Macau Black Bears (8pm) – Ch202.

FOOTBALL

AFC Asian Cup Gp E: North Korea v

Qatar (6.50pm), Gp F: Oman v Japan (9.20pm), Turkmenistan v Uzbekistan (11.50pm) – Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208.

English Premier League Everton v Bournemouth (10.15pm), Tottenham v Man United (tomorrow, 12.30am) – Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227. Spanish LaLiga Atletico v Levante (6.55pm), Bilbao v Sevilla (11.10pm), Barcelona v Elbar (tomorrow, 1.25am), Betis v Real Madrid (tomorrow,

3.40am) – StarHub Ch213.

TOMORROW

FOOTBALL

AFC Asian Cup Gp A: UAE v Thailand (11.50pm, Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208), India v Bahrain (11.50pm, Ch115 & Ch209). English Premier League Manchester City v Wolves (Tuesday, 4am, Singtel

TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227). Spanish LaLiga Sociedad v Espanyol (Tuesday, 3.55am, StarHub Ch213).

TENNIS

Australian Open Day 1 (8am & 4pm, Singtel TV Ch114 & Ch115, StarHub Ch208 & Ch209).

For latest updates, go to singtelv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

Fitness

HotBods

Text and pictures by Benjamin Sector



Jason Yang, 38
Lawyer

Height: 1.78m Weight: 81kg

Exercise regimen: I am a big fan of high intensity interval training because I don't always have a lot of time. I do CrossFit – essentially a combination of weightlifting, strength, callisthenics and cardiovascular endurance training performed at high intensity – four to five times a week. I also do boxing and outdoor conditioning once a week.

Diet: I am not on any specific diet plan but practise intermittent fasting for 16-hour blocks every 24 hours. I also try to keep my protein levels high and go carbohydrate light (at least during the weekdays for the latter). I am a firm believer that sustainability is key to any diet – it must be something you can live with in the long term as a lifestyle.



Angela Luo, 29
Bank associate director

Height: 1.52m Weight: 49kg

Exercise regimen: My focus is primarily on resistance and weight training four to five times a week, and also yoga on a weekly basis. I love the challenge they bring both physically and mentally. Generally, I hardly ever do cardio as I don't enjoy it, other than outdoor activities like hiking and kayaking.

Diet: I usually follow the 80-20 guideline, eating healthy most of the time and allowing flexibility for treats. I'm a foodie with a huge sweet tooth so this works for me to find balance and sustainability.

SCAN AND WATCH
Hot bods videos and more:
instagram.com/straits_times



Michael Yassa, senior co-author of the study, says memory power can be improved even with an easy session of yoga or tai chi. PHOTO: THERESA SHAN

EXERCISE CAN CHANGE MINDS STRAIGHT AWAY

Tests show that even light exercise can improve memory almost immediately

Ten minutes of mild, almost languorous exercise can immediately alter how certain parts of the brain communicate and coordinate with one another and improve memory function, according to an encouraging new neurological study.

The findings suggest that exercise does not need to be prolonged or intense to benefit the brain and that the effects can begin far more quickly than might be expected.

We already know that exercise can change our brains and minds. The evidence is extensive and growing.

Multiple studies with mice and rats have found that when the animals run on wheels or treadmills, they develop more new brain cells than if they remain sedentary.

Many of the new cells are clustered in the hippocampus, a portion of the brain that is essential for memory creation and storage. The active animals also perform better on tests of learning and memory.

Equivalent experiments examining brain tissue are not possible in people. But some past studies have shown that people who exercise regularly tend to have a larger, healthier hippocampus than those who do not, especially as they grow older. Even one bout of exercise, research suggests, can help most of us to focus and learn better than if we sit still.

But these studies usually involve moderate or vigorous exercise, such as jogging or brisk walking and often for weeks or months at a time.

Whether a single, brief spurt of very easy exercise will produce desirable changes in the brain has remained unclear.

So for the new study, which was published in September in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, scientists from the University of California, Irvine, and the University of Tsukuba in Japan turned to a group of healthy, young college students.

They recruited students in part because they are easy to come by on college campuses but also because bright, healthy, young men and women should have brains and memories that are functioning well.

For an experiment to produce improvements in their brain function,

its effects would need to be potent.

The scientists invited 36 of the students to the lab and had them sit quietly on a stationary bicycle for 10 minutes or, on a separate visit, pedal the bicycle at a pace so gentle it barely raised their heart rates.

The exercise was performed at about 30 per cent of each volunteer's maximum heart rate. By comparison, brisk walking should raise someone's heart rate to about 50 per cent of his or her maximum.

So this exercise was very easy. It also was short at 10 minutes.

Immediately after each session of the sitting or slow pedalling, the students completed a computerised memory test during which they would see a brief picture of, for instance, a tree, followed by a variety of other images and then a new image of either the same tree or a similar one.

The students would press buttons to show whether they thought each image was new or the same as an earlier shot.

The test is difficult, since many of

the images closely resemble one another. It requires rapid, deft shuffling through recent memories.

Next, the scientists had each student repeat this sequence, but the testing now took place inside an MRI machine that scanned the young people's brains while they responded to the images.

The effects of the exercise, undemanding as it was, were clear. The young people were better at remembering images after they had ridden the bike, especially when the images most closely resembled one another.

In other words, the harder their memories had to strain, the better they performed after the exercise.

More unexpected, their brains also worked differently. The MRI scans showed that portions of each student's hippocampus lit up in synchronised fashion with parts of the brain associated with learning, indicating that these physically separate parts of the brain were better connected now than when the students had not first exercised.

And the greater the coordination between the disparate parts, the better the memory test scores.

"It was exciting to see those effects occurring so quickly and after

such light exercise," said Michael Yassa, director of the UC Irvine Center for the Neurobiology of Learning and Memory and senior co-author of the new study with Hideaki Soya of the University of Tsukuba.

The findings show that exercise can change people's brains and minds right away, he said, without requiring weeks of working out. Even better, the exertion required can be so slight as to allow almost anyone, even those who are out of shape or possibly disabled, to complete the exercise.

How, at a molecular level, such gentle exercise affects the brain's operations is still unknown, he said, although he and his colleagues suspect that changes in blood flow and hormone levels are probably involved.

They hope to explore those issues in future studies and also look at the impact in younger and older people.

But already, the message is cheering.

"We are not talking about marathons," he said.

"It looks like people can improve their memories with a short walk or an easy session of something like yoga or tai chi." NYTIMES

EASY DOES IT

It was exciting to see those effects occurring so quickly and after such light exercise... It looks like people can improve their memories with a short walk or an easy session of something like yoga or tai chi.



MICHAEL YASSA, director of the UC Irvine Center for the Neurobiology of Learning and Memory, on light exercise.

SMBC Singapore Open clinic

Some of the world's best golfers will be in town for the Jan 17-20 SMBC Singapore Open. The Straits Times, in partnership with 100Plus, is offering ST readers an opportunity to learn from a pro in a golf clinic. Answer the following question correctly to earn a chance at winning a pair of passes (five pairs are available).

Date: Friday, Jan 18
Time: 2.30-3.30pm



Q: Who is the SMBC Singapore Open 2019 defending champion?
A:

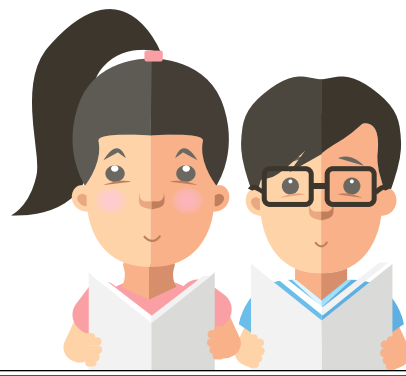
E-mail your answers (subject header: SMBC Singapore Open clinic), together with your name, IC and contact number to yufan.org@imsg.sg by 5pm, Monday, Jan 14

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Passes are not exchangeable.
- By entering this contest, you agree to share data (including personal data) with organisers solely for the purposes of this contest.
- The organisers' decision is final.
- Employees of 100Plus, IMSG and Singapore Press Holdings are not eligible to enter this contest.
- Passes to the tournament are valid only for

- admission to the Serapong Course at the Sentosa Golf Club and such other designated area(s) (the "Venue") on the date(s) as shown. The Sentosa Island admission fee and vehicle fee shall still apply. Passes must be produced at appropriate entry points and/or on demand by any authorised official. Pass holders shall display their passes at all times whilst they are at the venue.
- All passes are personal to the holders and are strictly non-transferable.

Insight



Invest
7 tips on funding
your children's
education B16

B

THE LABOUR CRUNCH ISSUE



A tight labour market is getting tighter in some sectors. Yet, while employers lament a shortage of staff, older workers worry about keeping their jobs. Six months into a high-level work group's review of policies for older workers, Insight looks at the issues. B4&5

ZAKIR HUSSAIN
Shaping
Singapore's
future through
the past B2

**IN GOOD
COMPANY**
Functioning
the Pivotal
way B3



China and
its economic
stake in
Rakhine
B6&7



LOH KENG FATT
Loyalty schemes:
Do they have to be
such a chore?
B14



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The Sunday Times says

Libraries match society’s changes

Seeping sea views are not generally something anyone would expect from a library. But library @ harbourfront, which officially opened yesterday, boasts not just attractive vistas but also a collection of augmented reality books for children and learning pods where adults can access digital content. Singaporeans are now accustomed to such lush libraries – a reflection of how well the National Library Board (NLB) has evolved to suit the changing needs of the community over the years. Locat-

ing libraries in malls is not the first way the library sought to reach out.

In 1960, Hedwig Anuar, the first Singaporean director of the library, introduced a mobile library service, using old army vans to reach children in rural districts. In the mid-1990s, after the Library 2000 report, the NLB underwent a startling technological transformation. Powered by a \$1 billion war chest, it introduced a slew of technical improvements such as self-checkout machines and

added lifestyle elements such as cafes to draw younger patrons. Nowadays, readers can read e-books, check out books with their NLB mobile app and hang out at snazzy outlets like the Harbourfront library. The NLB has continued to keep pace with technology, thanks to its understanding that the library is all about managing information, whether in book or binary form.

As a traditional bastion promoting research and learning, it has also taken on the mission of helping

people to start thinking about the information they receive with its S.U.R.E. (Source, Understand, Research and Evaluate) initiative. As libraries worldwide seek to redefine themselves as digital natives while keeping their brick-and-mortar roots, the NLB had a head start in the race, given the strong foundation laid in the past decades. But it should also seek to always stay ahead of the curve, as Singaporeans will continue to need its help in navigating the ever-growing information superhighway.

ThinkingAloud

Looking back 700 years to glean lessons for the future

Our history reminds us that threats to our survival remain, but should also instil confidence we'll thrive



Zakir Hussain

News Editor

When Singapore marked the sesquicentennial – or 150th anniversary – of Raffles' landing in 1969, the overriding narrative of the time was that this island's history prior to 1819 was as a sleepy fishing village.

As it marks its bicentennial this year, organisers have made clear that activities will also look back on Singapore's 700 years.

And the Singapore Bicentennial logo is not two – but seven – overlapping poly shapes that form a circle, one for each century.

What's happened? Archaeology, for one thing. Excavations in Fort Canning and around the Singapore River for the past 25 years or so have revealed a considerable treasure trove of artefacts, coinage, royal jewellery, pottery and even human teeth dating back 700 years that attest to the existence of an old kingdom and a trading port here.

What was once learnt about as legend has become more widely accepted as part of our history, and with evidence to boot.

Take the story of how Singapore got its name, as documented in the Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals.

When Sang Nila Utama, the prince from Palembang, landed on our shores in 1299, this island was known as Temasek.

On the plain near the mouth of a river, he and his attendants saw, as the Malay Annals describes it, an animal "extremely swift and beautiful, its body of a red colour, its head black and its breast white, extremely agile and of great strength, its size a little larger than a he-goat". The animal then went

inland and disappeared.

One of Sang Nila Utama's ministers said the animal appeared to be a lion, and the prince decided the island would henceforth be renamed Singapura, or Lion City.

Historians have said that in all likelihood, he saw a tiger, for lions have not been recorded or sighted in the wild in this corner of Asia.

The name has stuck, and was a consideration for setting up a settlement when Thomas Stamford Raffles landed in January 1819.

Since then, the English rendering – Singapore – has become more widely used.

But as Singapore marks the 200th anniversary of that landing and its founding as a modern settlement, there has also been some public debate over the validity of that commemoration, the need to recognise a wider cast of characters who contributed to the country's development, and the question of what exactly are we marking.

Organisers have made clear 1819 is just a marker, "an occasion for us to reflect on our history before and after Raffles, how we've evolved from a place with a geographically strategic location to a people with a unique Singaporean DNA".

Physical landmarks are also being transformed.

Take Fort Canning Hill – 720 years after Sang Nila Utama set up court there, the hill is being spruced up and will host a new heritage gallery on the island's past.

Historical gardens and an ancient forgotten spring where royals once bathed will be recreated, and an escalator is being built from Fort Canning MRT station to the hill's peak to make it more accessible.

Changes have also been made at the Raffles Landing Site along the Singapore River, where the statue of Raffles has been joined by four others (albeit for one year): Tan Tock Seng, community leader and philanthropist; Munshi Abdullah, Raffles' secretary and interpreter; Naraina Pillai, chief clerk at the treasury; and Sang Nila Utama.

This acknowledgement and recognition of a much longer past, and other key contributors to it, is significant.

But the bicentennial should be more than just about viewing, or visiting, artefacts and exhibits.

It is a timely opportunity to look back 700 years into Singapore's past to glean lessons for the future.

Here's why. The general narrative of Singapore's history and development since 1819 – barring episodic upheavals like the Great Depression, the Japanese Occupation and the turbulence of the 1960s – has tended to be one of progress: Each generation doing better than the previous one, with this island becoming a more attractive place to live, work and play with each passing year.

But this is not guaranteed.



Going back 700 years and earlier is a stark reminder that Singapore has been besieged and brought down. And there could come a time when similar threats to its security and survival surface.

Looking back 700 years is also a reminder that Singapore is very much part of this region.

And its past has been tied intimately to regional pressures.

Expansionary ambitions among regional powers and larger entities – the Majapahit kingdom in Java, and Siam – played a role in the downfall of Sang Nila Utama's successors. Some might see shades of this in today's surge in nationalist sentiment among larger countries in the region.

In the 14th century, the Javanese epic poem Nagarakertagama recorded that the Majapahit prime minister, Gajah Mada, took a vow to abstain from spices until he had unified the entire Nusantara, or archipelago. His oath lists key cities across the region: "Only when Gurun, Seram, Tanjung Pura, Haru, Pahang, Dompo, Bali, Sunda, Palembang, Temasek, are all defeated, then will I break my fast."

The Malay Annals records that Hayam Wuruk, the ruler of the Majapahit kingdom on Java, sent envoys to Singapura to demand allegiance from its raja during the reign of Sri Pikrama Wira, from about 1347-1362.

The Majapahit envoys sent to this island brought with them, as the customary present, a thin wood shaving that was cut without a break and rolled up in the form of a girl's ear stud.

The then Raja of Singapura, Sri Pikrama Wira, interpreted this as impugning the manliness of the valour of his warriors.

He called a skilled carpenter to shave the head of a young boy with an adze, and presented the adze to the envoys.

The message was not lost – if the Javanese attempted to invade, their heads would be similarly shaved – and a fleet of Majapahit ships set sail for Singapura.

When they landed, the annals said: "A great battle ensued. Loud rang weapon on weapon, terrifying was the roar of the warriors shouting, the din was unimaginable."

Singapore stood firm.

"Many were slain on both sides and the blood flowed on the ground till evening, when the Javans fell back to their prahus," the account read. "Singapura, however, was not worsted but, on the contrary, the Javan hosts returned to Majapahit."

Such independence was too much for Hayam Wuruk to stomach and, years later, a larger fleet appeared off Singapore.

For days, the city was besieged without much success.

But a disgruntled treasury officer, who felt he had been wronged by the Raja, opened the gates of the city at dawn. Mayhem ensued.

"So many were killed on either side that blood flowed like a river in spate and flooded the fort of Singapura on the seashore."

Today's regional – and global – environment has come a long way since those days of blood and gore. But as more recent conflicts show, a breakdown in trust can come fast, and tensions can escalate rapidly.

There is also a need to ensure internal unity against threats, and avoid a disgruntled officer metaphorically opening the gates.

Singapore may not see another siege any time soon, but neither did Qatar expect to be blockaded by its neighbours and former allies – a state of affairs that has gone on for 1½ years, and counting.

Looking back 700 years also offers a reminder that bonds between leaders and the people are crucial.

Take the story of the legendary swordfish attack in the Malay Annals. When part of the coast was attacked and many residents were injured or killed by the creatures, then Raja Paduka Sri Maharaja ordered men to form a barricade with their legs.

But the fish leapt upon them and they, too, were killed. A young boy

was heard saying: "Why are we deceiving ourselves? If we made a barricade of banana stems, would not that be better?"

The ruler said the boy was right, and ordered his men to build such a barricade. As soon as the fish leapt, their snouts stuck on the banana stems, where they were cut down and killed in numbers.

The attacks ended. The site of the attacks was named Tanjong Pagar, or fenced promontory, after the fence of stems.

However, dissension soon ensued. Palace chiefs feared the clever boy would, when he grew older, threaten their positions, and felt it would be better to get rid of him. The king agreed and ordered the boy to be put to death, depriving the kingdom of someone who could have helped stave off future attacks.

When Singapore was finally sacked by the Majapahit towards the end of the 14th century, less than 100 years after its founding by Sang Nila Utama, many of its royals and residents dispersed throughout the region.

But the island rebounded as a trading hub and its links, especially with Johor and other ports in the region in the 16th and 17th centuries, were documented by European explorers.

At a time of considerable uncertainty in the global economy, South-east Asia is a natural hinterland for Singapore, and the bicentennial should also be a reminder of the need for – and value of – greater awareness and understanding of our immediate neighbours and how they, too, have evolved over the past 700 years.

Some might wonder whether Singapore will survive a strong global or regional crisis, or a siege.

Looking back on 700 years ought to give greater confidence that we won't just survive, but have a strong chance to get stronger and thrive.

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SEE INSIGHT B8

The statue of Sir Stamford Raffles (centre) by the Singapore River has been joined by (from left) community leader Tan Tock Seng, Raffles' secretary and interpreter Munshi Abdullah, treasury chief clerk Naraina Pillai and Sang Nila Utama.
ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

InGoodCompany

From Google to SLA, Rob Mee's pivotal journey

He relishes empowering firms to help them take advantage of agile software the Pivotal way



Ravi Velloor

Associate Editor

In the 1990s, a group of software developers in the United States started a movement that would come to be ultimately called agile software. Emphasising close collaboration between the development crew and business stakeholders, tight teams, face-to-face interaction, early and continuous delivery of software, ability to take in new requirements even late in the development cycle, and simplicity of design and product, they cocked a snook at the large enterprise firms that spent months on what the challengers called a “waterfall approach” of prolonged analysis, software design and test periods before delivering to customers whose requirements may well have changed in the meantime.

Mr Rob Mee, chief executive officer of Pivotal Software Inc, does not lay claim to originating the movement but he was fortunate to be present at the creation of this process of continuous feedback and learn-as-you-go style of software development.

“About 80 per cent of large software projects in the ’80s and ’90s failed,” says Mr Mee, who led a 10-person team at the firm then known as Pivotal Labs. “Then, you had this small group of developers rebelling against the idea that you could plan and design everything in advance because (they believed that) software is soft, malleable – you can modify it all the time.”

It all sounds to me like a Rafa Nadal waiting for a swift, looping Federer tennis serve, making tiny adjustments to his body, feet, position and angle of his racquet even as the ball leaves the big Swiss player and journeys to his side of the net and finds contact for the return of serve. Mr Mee, though, prefers an analogy from Greek philosopher Aristotle’s law of motion that says if you drop an object from a height to Earth, its fall would accelerate at a proportion relative to its mass.

“That law held for many years until Galileo did an experiment and said it is not correct at all, (but) this is how it works,” says Mr Mee. “The question is: Why would you make up something like that and say it works without ever trying? It seems preposterous. Software is similar. The modern philosophy says ‘I have a hypothesis that I want to test as fast as I can. So, I am going to build a little bit of software and try it. Then, get feedback. If I was wrong, hypothesis invalid, I throw it out. If it was right, great. But it may also be in-between, which we can modify and get to the right

place’. This is a more scientific way.”

Although a few big corporations such as Orient Overseas Container Line of Hong Kong, Chrysler and the now defunct Northern Telecom were on to agile software, the big guns largely ignored it. Instead, it was the technology firms and venture capital-backed start-ups that proved receptive to the idea of software development that optimises for continuous change, one that looks chaotic from the outside but requires a large measure of discipline to execute.

Early Pivotal clients included eBay, Google, TaskRabbit and Groupon, not to speak of Twitter, one of Mr Mee’s big clients.

We know now what followed. While most companies in the Global 2000 were rooted to their spots, the nimble outsiders began to disrupt their businesses. This has caused consternation among the giants, which have begun to respond and look for the equivalent of a software company within their own walls.

“We worked with all the famous ones and a lot of the smaller ones,” says the 55-year-old Mr Mee, who is himself neither on Facebook nor Twitter and is self-admittedly introverted and extremely shy. “In the early 2000s, we rotated to 90 per cent start-ups. Now, we have rotated to 90 per cent large companies. In a sense, we have come full circle.”

He says not just the big banks, insurers, auto and retail giants, but even governments are starting to think this way. Pivotal counts the United States Federal government as a major client.

One interesting assignment is with the US Air Force, which is modernising the software that controls all the logistics of how aircraft are deployed, refuelled and so on. Mr Mee says the USAF turned to Pivotal after spending US\$700 million (\$946 million) on a large defence contractor, with apparently unsatisfactory results. The first job was to build a “tanker planter” – a system of refuelling fighters midair.

“We did that system in a co-development mode with the air force in four months, with air force developers sitting right outside my office in San Francisco,” he says. “That led to the cancellation of the large defence project and they switched to us. The way we did that was to not become a defence contractor but to help the air force build its own capabilities. In the last year and a half that we’ve been working with them, they’ve established a software factory outside of Boston with many teams working there.”

In the early days of Pivotal Labs, the team could work on a project for a period and once done, take a few months off to travel the world before regrouping. These days, it works like a proper company, more so since Pivotal listed its shares last March.

As in the US, staff in Singapore, after being treated to free breakfast, gather around for a short meeting at 9.06am every day where ideas are tossed around and someone brings up an interesting thing he has just learnt about. 9.06 was picked as the earliest that programmers, who’d otherwise be more inclined to drift in at 10.30am, would likely make it for the meeting and the free breakfast ensures they wouldn’t discover themselves to be starving at 11 am.

Early last month, the cloud company, majority-owned by Dell Technologies, reported third-quarter results that beat analysts’ expectations. Revenue was US\$168 million, up 30 per cent from the year-ago period. Subscription revenue, which shot



Pivotal CEO Rob Mee at the Robinson Road office. As in the US, staff in Singapore, after a free breakfast, gather for a meeting at 9.06am every day where ideas are tossed around and someone brings up an interesting thing he has learnt about. 9.06 was picked as the earliest that programmers would likely make it for the meeting. The breakfast ensures they wouldn’t find themselves starving at 11 am. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

HIRING AMAZING TALENT

My sense was that it's really about hiring the right people and giving them the right environment. You can build that capacity anywhere. Hiring amazing talent in Singapore is very straightforward, not a problem. (Singapore's environment) is very conducive to the work that we specialise in.



CEO ROB MEE, on hiring the right people and giving them the right environment

up 53 per cent from a year ago, climbed to US\$101 million.

Investors appreciate subscription revenue over traditional software licences for its steadier income stream.

Still, the company is adjusting to the unforgiving nature of financial markets after its listing in the first half of 2018. After shares soared upon strong first-quarter results, Pivotal stock fell sharply when it failed to meet expectations in the

second quarter. “One investor said you crushed expectations in the first quarter and in the second quarter, you were crushed by expectations,” muses Mr Mee. “The third quarter was somewhere in the middle.”

Interestingly, Pivotal has been picking up several blue-chip clients in Singapore.

Curious to know how this corporate minnow won clients such as DBS Group, Singapore Airlines, PSA Corp and SingPower, I dug a little into its regional management and was not surprised to see the name of Lionel Lim appear as managing director of the Asia-Pacific operations. Mr Lim is a respected industry veteran, having previously helmed companies such as Sun Microsystems and CA Technologies in the region.

Pivotal says it helps firms like DBS build a modern cloud architecture that enables agile methodologies as well as level the field with the software disruptors. It took teams from DBS and placed them in the Pivotal office and moved them back once they were fully equipped to function the Pivotal way. “Siew Choo Soh said she hadn’t had any downtime in the two years they’ve deployed our technology,” he says, referring to DBS Group’s head of consumer banking and big data/AI technology.

I’ve heard the San Francisco-based Mr Mee say that Silicon Valley was a “state of mind”. He explains that in the early 2000s, you often had venture capitalists urging companies in London, Bangalore and Sydney to move to

the Valley if they wanted to build a next-generation company. Mr Mee says he found the notion that to succeed you had to be in a particular location rather fishy.

“My sense was that it’s really about hiring the right people and giving them the right environment,” he says, noting that he had opened office in Singapore, Tokyo, London and Sydney. “You can build that capacity anywhere. Hiring amazing talent in Singapore is very straightforward, not a problem. (Singapore’s environment) is very conducive to the work that we specialise in.”

Likewise, he also thinks there is too much hype about artificial intelligence (AI), particularly the fear that it will become self-aware, grow exponentially and take over the world. In his view, AI is just another form of computation of algorithms and data. Besides, AI researchers have always tended to be way ahead of themselves in terms of what is possible. In 1968, when Stanley Kubrick was shooting the epic sci-fi film 2001: A Space Odyssey, they came up with the idea of HAL, the computer that becomes operational in 1992 and is portrayed as the main antagonist. Likewise, AI pioneer Herbert A. Simon had predicted in 1965 that “machines will be capable, within 20 years, of doing any work a man can do”.

“In 2018, we had Siri. That is nowhere near HAL – and we are not going to be anytime in the future,” Mr Mee says. “It is going to take longer than people think.”

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Fast facts

THE CEO

Rob Mee has been chief executive officer of Pivotal Software since August 2015. He is 55 years old.

Mr Mee was educated at the University of California-Berkeley, on a

scholarship from IBM, where his father worked at the time. It was there he discovered his love for programming, working first as an intern at the IBM Los Gatos lab, and after graduation, its artificial intelligence centre in Tokyo.

Mr Mee and his wife, a former

software developer, have boys aged seven, five and two. His hobbies include practising jujitsu and reading. The Mees live in Buena Vista, San Francisco.

THE COMPANY

Pivotal Software was formed in

2012 after spinning out of EMC Corp and VMware (which was majority-owned by EMC). The name came from the Pivotal Labs which had been acquired by EMC. It provides platform-as-a-service solutions on cloud-based platforms to build, deploy and operate software,

including enterprises in automotive, financial services, industrial, media, insurance and technology.

Its Singapore clients include DBS Group, Singapore Airlines and PSA Corp.

The firm reported third quarter total revenue of US\$168 million

(\$\$227 million), an increase of 30 per cent year over year, setting it on course to report annual revenue of about US\$658 million for the 2019 fiscal year.

Pivotal has a market capitalisation of about US\$4.5 billion. It has 2,800 employees worldwide.

Manpower crunch

LABOUR SHORTAGE

It's a constant refrain among businesses: there aren't enough workers. Insight looks at why there is a labour crunch, what affected sectors are doing, and what more could be done.

Several key factors at play

Seow Bei Yi

Companies in Singapore are finding it tough to fill vacancies, whether for highly-skilled roles in the tech sector or labour intensive jobs that fewer locals are keen to do.

Behind this manpower crunch – which some say is holding back business growth plans – are a greying population and tight foreign labour policies, as well as a mismatch between jobs in demand and the skills needed to fill them.

As of 2018, population growth fell to 1 per cent over the last five years from 3 per cent the previous five.

With the resident birth rate slip-

ping over the past two decades or so, fewer Singaporeans are entering the workforce. The number aged 20 to 64 is expected to peak at 2.2 million around 2020, and will decline after that.

Adding to population trends are policy issues, such as a tightening of foreign worker inflows that traces back to 2010, DBS economist Irvin Seah tells Insight.

"Many companies were not given enough time to adjust," says Mr Seah, who notes the tightening aimed to encourage businesses to invest in technology and reduce reliance on cheap foreign labour.

This started with higher levies for work permits and S-Passes. Further measures include a move last year to open vacancies to locals first.

But not every industry can be automated yet. Some, like cleaning, remain labour intensive, says Mr Seah.

"Policy has tightened aggressively and in segments where manpower is needed the most," he says. "These are jobs that Singaporeans shun, to begin with."

While corporations have more resources to invest in technology and tend to engage in higher value work, he says, smaller enterprises bear the brunt of such policy moves.

The labour market report released by the Manpower Ministry last month also noted there were more vacancies than job seekers for a third consecutive quarter. Labour economist Randolph Tan, an associate professor at the Singapore University of Social Sciences, expects the shortage to worsen in specialised areas like data science.

Even as schools now have courses like business analytics, it will take time to develop enough specialists to meet demand – and companies need them already.

"Demand for talent is not just getting higher, it seems to be spiking. A lot of what we are using is producing a lot of data and some organisations are able to use it to their advantage. Those that don't, do so at their own peril," he says.

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Measures already in place

As tertiary institutions ramp up enrolment for in-demand fields, a cross-sector study involving NTUC is also looking into how workers can be matched to future jobs – to pave the way for specific training programmes for each sector.

Their efforts to combat Singapore's labour shortage complement companies' moves towards automation for repetitive tasks, a national push for lifelong learning, and programmes to help professionals "convert" their skills for new roles.

While the demographic shift towards an ageing population plays out more gradually, giving policymakers leeway for changes, DBS Bank economist Irvin Seah says the jobs-skills mismatch appears to be a more "burning" issue.

There are few policy options available, beyond helping displaced professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMETs) upskill, he says, and this group tends to spend more time finding a new job. Targeted schemes such as Workforce Singapore's Professional Conversion Programmes help alleviate this, as they allow PMETs to either be hired before being trained for a role, or to be given training ahead of job placements.

Such efforts extend beyond government support. Last year, local universities increased their computing intakes by as much as 25 per cent, with some starting new courses as well. Such moves can increase the talent pool in the pipeline, although such is the demand

that students already receive job offers before graduation.

For employees already in the market, the study is looking to collect data from different clusters to help define how workers can be trained even as workplaces undergo changes.

This move towards "Worker 4.0" includes paving the way for specific training programmes in various sectors.

Mr Kurt Wee, president of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, says that while smaller firms are hit by the labour crunch, many have already "transformed" by digitalising processes in human resources and accounting.

Labour-intensive sectors such as food and beverage, and manufacturing have also been firing up workers for higher value tasks.

"The transformation push is going to remain critical, and businesses have to find ways to work at optimal productivity so they can overcome the manpower crunch," says Mr Wee.

Seow Bei Yi

Looking at what more can be done

One step towards easing the labour crunch could be allowing smaller enterprises to receive "preferential treatment" in more areas, to hasten their adoption of technology and innovation, say economists.

To respond to shortages, companies can also tap older workers who are past retirement age, and people who have been out of the workforce for a long time, such as caregivers.

While workers should be prepared to retrain for new roles, more could be done to help identify the best courses for reskilling, beyond identifying the broad skills they can learn, says Associate Professor Randolph Tan of the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

"The degree of training is haphazard, and this is causing companies

a lot of angst," he adds, noting that there are no tailor-made approaches to reskilling workers.

Businesses need to step up as well, with Mr Kurt Wee, president of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, adding that "companies need to train their manpower and ready them for how jobs are going to evolve".

"Businesses should also use this period of transformation to work towards an optimal business model that is digitalised as well," he said.

But as smaller enterprises may find it harder to invest in technol-

ogy that can automate some of their tasks, DBS economist Irvin Seah says "preferential treatment" for such companies could be expanded.

An example is the Automation Support Package announced in Budget 2016 to help companies adopt technology, drive productivity and scale up, with over \$400 million set aside for three years, he says.

Under the scheme, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have better access to loans for qualifying projects, and the Government's risk-share with participating financial institutions is 70 per cent – up from 50 per cent – for projects.

But Mr Seah notes: "Some SMEs may find it onerous to meet documentation requirements for certain grants. Instead, bigger companies, which are of better financial standing, end up qualifying and receiving aid. There should be more equitable access to these resources."

Seow Bei Yi

To respond to shortages, companies can also tap older workers who are past retirement age, and people who have been out of the workforce for a long time, such as caregivers.

23.8%

Share of workers aged 55 and up in the resident labour force in 2018 (preliminary figures).

14.6%

Share of workers aged 55 and up in the resident labour force in 2008.

58.8%

Full-time employment rate for older residents aged 55 to 64 in 2017.

83%

Part-time employment rate for older residents aged 55 to 64 in 2017.

3 CONSECUTIVE QUARTERS

In which there were more vacancies than jobseekers, according to a Manpower Ministry labour market report.

76.7

Projected number of years of "full health" for Singapore residents in 2030.

2020

The year when the number of people aged 20-64 is expected to peak at 2.2 million.

83.1

Life expectancy at birth for Singapore residents in 2017.

THE CHALLENGE: Making the most of silver capital

Joanna Seow
Manpower Correspondent

When Ms Premalatha Sadhasivan, 60, was asked to take a large pay cut in 2017 as her company was downsizing, she was anxious to find a new job.

Then a manager at a private education institution, she was paying off her elder daughter's education loans for postgraduate medical school overseas. Her husband was semi-retired.

But, she says, it is easy to lose confidence while looking for a job at her age. "Employers who look at resumes of mature workers may think 'slow, cannot work'."

She soon became a social worker at Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore), and was made head of the rehabilitation department, thanks to her past managerial experience.

She hopes to continue working after she reaches retirement age next year, by doing her part to stay valuable to her employer.

"I can feel that my younger co-workers are very fast with computer skills and are more nimble, so I have to spend a bit more time to learn and keep myself healthy," she says.

Ms Premalatha is among the one in three Singapore resident employees today aged 50 and above.

With an ageing workforce, Singapore's manpower challenges are only set to rise as the working-age citizen population – those aged 20 to 64 – is projected to peak next year.

Tapping the growing pool of older workers is one way to ensure companies and organisations can continue to flourish.

"At a national level, keeping older persons in productive employment can arrest or even reverse the deterioration in the old-age support ratio



Ms Premalatha Sadhasivan, 60, was a manager at a private education institution when it downsized. She later became a social worker and now heads a rehabilitation department, thanks to her managerial experience. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

and possible weakening of the country's fiscal position from an increase in the number of old-age dependents," Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) senior research fellow Christopher Gee tells Insight.

Being gainfully employed also helps people age successfully, and relieves family members from the responsibility of financial support and care, he adds.

But even as the employment rate for older workers has improved, many worry about maintaining their income in their later years, while employers worry about medical costs and the ability of older staff to cope with technological changes.

This was among feedback gathered by a work group reviewing policies on re-employment and retirement adequacy, which was shared

at an IPS forum last week.

Members of the Tripartite Workgroup on Older Workers – first announced in May last year and now six months into its review – were quizzed at the forum on the need for a legislated retirement age.

Former Nominated MP Kanwaljit Soin had commented at the forum that with so many years of good health expected here, it would be hard for people to work for 35 to 40 years and then sustain another 35 to 40 years of retirement.

"To keep the retirement age at 62, and then to give yearly extensions, workers feel very insecure and they cannot plan for their lives," she said.

The statutory retirement age is 62, meaning employees below 62 cannot be unfairly dismissed based on age. Companies must also offer equivalent workers re-employment up

to age 67, though there is flexibility for adjustment in employment terms such as wages and benefits.

Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower Low Yen Ling, a member of the work group, said that based on the feedback received by the Tripartite Workgroup on Older Workers, the construct of a retirement age and re-employment age remains relevant.

The desire of older people to work as long as they want to with the same wages and benefits must be balanced with the need to ensure they remain employable and companies remain competitive, she said.

Companies should not be forced to employ people for too long, added fellow work group member Alexander Melchers, who is vice-president of the Singapore National

Employers Federation.

Employers also take their cue from the state of the economy, he said. "The guarantee of a job comes only from a flourishing economy and not from legislation..."

"Legislation can guarantee there's a job only if there are jobs."

While some workers are keen to take a break or move into less intense roles as they age, others, like Ms Premalatha, want to or need to keep working.

The Centre For Seniors, which helps older people manage transitions in life, surveyed over 1,100 people aged 50 and above in 2016, and found that only 10 per cent want to retire.

In fact, finding work in lower-skilled, low-pay service jobs is not difficult for older workers, and many are employed in industries like retail, security and cleaning, says NMP Walter Theesira, an economist at the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

"The challenge is whether employers are willing to consider older workers for more desirable, high-pay, high-skill jobs," Associate Professor Theesira tells Insight.

Employers still harbour concerns that an ageing workforce means that they face the rising cost of providing medical benefits and uncertainty over whether older workers can perform jobs redesigned to suit them, noted Mr Vikas Sharma, research director at Blackbox Research, which organised public engagement sessions for the tripartite work group.

An employer had said the challenge is to find what jobs older workers can do, as new jobs in the market may not be suitable for them, shared Mr Sharma at the IPS forum.

But some employers also see mature workers as an asset.

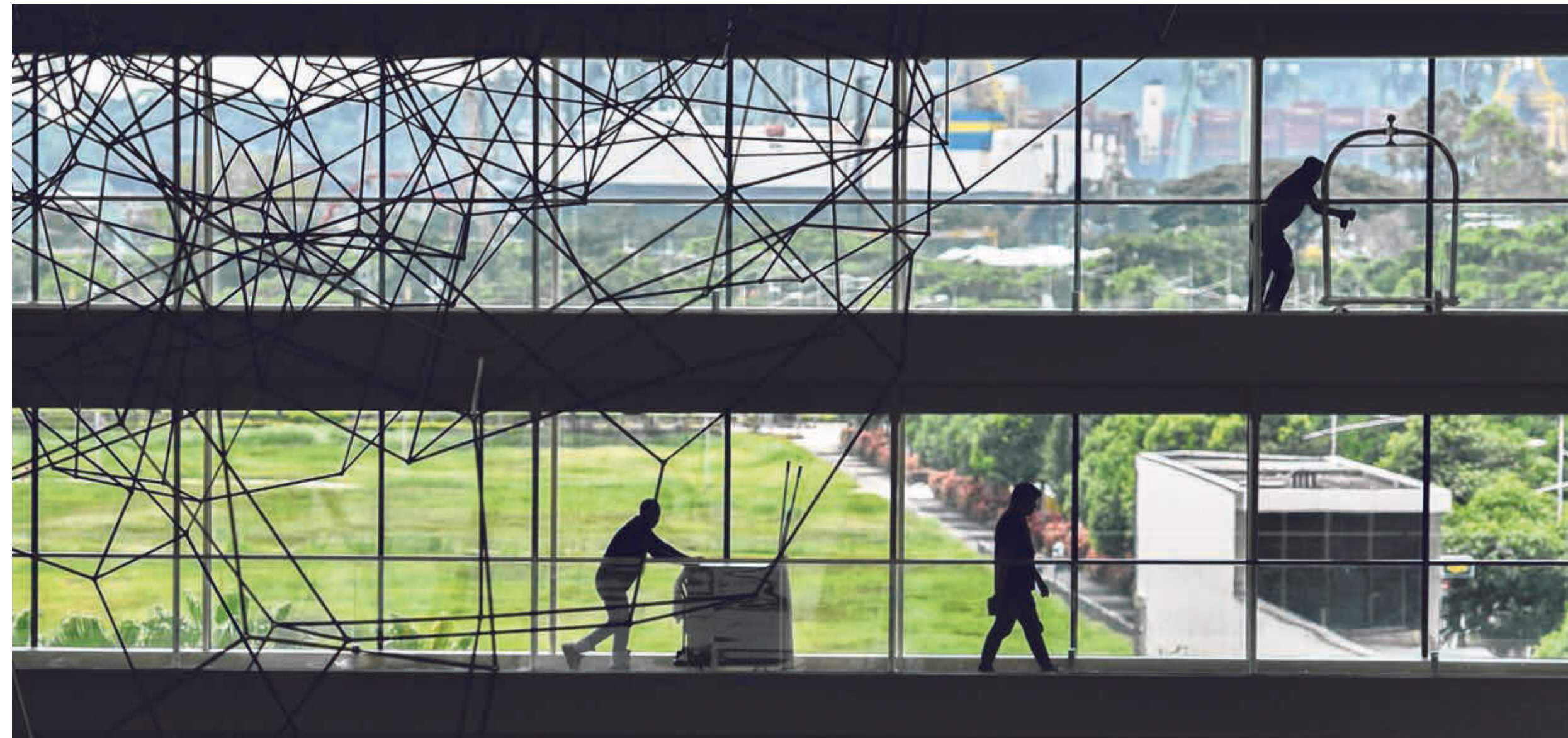
Ms Premalatha's employer, Mr S. Devendran, chief executive of Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore), says older employees are well positioned to empathise with people facing challenges.

"They have their life experience, which is not something that can be taught in a classroom," he says.

As more Singaporeans hit retirement age and wish to carry on working, many hope their employers – and women be employers – share this view.

The employee is not forced to continue working if he does not wish to, nor is the employer forced to offer him the same terms as before, he adds.

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Experts suggest that reviewing compensation structures, raising or removing the retirement age in companies, and having flexible work arrangements could improve the employability of older workers. They also agreed that there is a need to shift mindsets among employers to recognise the value of older workers in their organisations. Studies also show that multigenerational workforces are more productive and have less turnover than those without age diversity. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

OTHER APPROACHES: Look at productivity, not age

Given the need to tap the older workforce as well as provide good jobs for ageing Singaporeans, how can companies be encouraged to hire and retain older staff?

Suggestions from experts often involve better measurements of workers' contributions.

For instance, the re-employment age, now 67, could be linked instead to the health-adjusted life expectancy, which estimates the number of years a person is expected to live in good health, says Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) senior research fellow Christopher Gee.

The number was 73.6 in 2016 and is projected to be 76 in 2030.

"With health advancements, fixed chronological age milestones become less and less relevant indicators of someone's productive capacity," he tells Insight.

The employee is not forced to continue working if he does not wish to, nor is the employer forced to offer him the same terms as before, he adds.

REVIEW COMPENSATION

Companies can also change the way they compensate employees.

Pay structures are often still linked to age, with older workers being paid more than younger ones. This typically happens because companies want to encourage workers to stay on with the firm, or

encourage younger workers to put in a tremendous amount of effort to reach a small number of high pay senior positions, says Nominated MP Walter Theesira, an economist at the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

"What the employer wants is for the worker to put in more effort than they're getting paid, earlier in life. Later in life, the worker is paid too much, so the employer looks for reasons to terminate them," he says.

Removing this age-wage structure could improve the employability of older workers.

This view is echoed by Dr John Elliott, a recently retired associate professor of psychology at the National University of Singapore, who says that paying workers more when they are younger has two major benefits: "You get more money when you need it, for example to start a family, and less when you're older so it is less of a disincentive for employers to employ you."

But National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) deputy secretary-general Heng Chee How said at an IPS forum last week that front-loading wages may not be the best solution.

"To replace one form of tyranny with another is not necessarily the answer," he said, suggesting instead the use of a more objective performance-based measure to de-

termine pay, regardless of age.

Mr Heng, who is a member of the Tripartite Workgroup on Older Workers, noted that the ratio of maximum to minimum salary for individual jobs here has come down over time as more companies use performance-based systems.

In fact, if issues with employment such as age discrimination or the age-wage structure are addressed, the need for a retirement age could be eliminated, said Associate Professor Theesira.

RAISE THE RETIREMENT AGE

Even though there is a statutory retirement age, companies can already go beyond this to raise or remove the limit for their staff.

A number have done so. Novotel Singapore Clarke Quay and Prudential are examples of employers who scrapped the retirement age, while Gardens by the Bay and Comfort-DeGru Group have raised their retirement ages to 65 and 67 respectively.

NTUC secretary-general Ng Chee Meng has called on more employers to voluntarily raise the retirement age for their staff.

Some 20 unionised companies have either voluntarily raised their retirement ages or do not stipulate any retirement age in workers' employment contracts.

Control over how long to work

and the intensity of the work emerged as some of the aspirations of Singaporean workers during the tripartite work group's public engagement sessions.

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

To encourage workers to extend their working years, companies can also offer flexible work arrangements such as job sharing, where a full-time job is broken into two part-time jobs, work-from-home days or flexible hours.

Mr Lee Pak Sing, divisional director for the workplace policy and strategy division at the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), said in a presentation at the IPS forum that there is scope to raise the part-time employment rate for older workers, which stood at 8.3 per cent in 2017 for Singapore residents aged 55 to 64.

This places Singapore in 23rd position against Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries, compared with its 9th position for the full-time employment rate for older workers.

But some seniors may be working because they need the income, so part-time jobs may not be sufficient for them, notes Ms Lim Sia Hoe, executive director of the Centre for Seniors (CFS).

Some older workers hope for more support to go for training as job demands evolve, although

some employers also find their staff are fearful of change.

MOM data shows that the training participation rate among Singapore residents aged 50 to 64 rose from 28.8 per cent in 2016 to 33.7 per cent in 2017, but still remains lower than the overall rate of 47.9 per cent.

Finally, one common theme is the need to shift mindsets among employers to recognise the value of older workers in their organisations.

Institute for Human Resource Professionals chief executive Mayank Parekh says that many studies in the United States have shown that multigenerational workforces are more productive and have less turnover than those without age diversity.

Stereotypes and the toxic narratives – from "resistant to change" to "too old to learn" – should be debunked," he says.

As for those seniors who do wish to retire, good planning in terms of finances and a routine is important, said CFS's Ms Lim.

"Be aware of and understand life transitions so that you are confident to handle changes, take care of yourself and your health, and remain purposefully active in the community," she says.

Some older workers hope for more support to go for training as job demands evolve, although

AGE-WAGE PAY STRUCTURE

What the employer wants is for the worker to put in more effort than they're getting paid, earlier in life. Later in life, the worker is paid too much, so the employer looks for reasons to terminate them.

NOMINATED MP WALTER THEESIRA, an economist at the Singapore University of Social Sciences, on why pay structures are often still linked to age.

GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT

At a national level, keeping older persons in productive employment can arrest or even reverse the deterioration in the old-age support ratio and possible weakening of the country's fiscal position from an increase in the number of old-age dependents.

”

MR CHRISTOPHER GEE, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies.

SOLUTIONS: Policies, training and wage subsidies

Recognising that having enough for retirement is a concern for Singaporeans, and that many need help coping with the changing nature of jobs, policies have been put in place to boost the employability of older workers.

Raising the re-employment age from 65 to 67 in 2017 is the latest legislative change.

Re-employment rates are high. More than 98 per cent of local, private-sector workers reaching the age of 62 who wish to continue

working are offered re-employment, Mr Lee Pak Sing, divisional director for the workplace policy and strategy division at the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), said in a presentation at last week's forum.

Also, the majority of those re-employed in the same job were paid at least the same wages as before.

Mr Lee said an MOM study in 2017 found that retirement and re-employment laws have raised the employment rate of the targeted group of older workers an average

of 1.6 percentage points a year since being implemented in 2012.

Central Provident Fund (CPF) contribution rates have also been raised over the years to help workers save more for retirement.

In 2016, both the employer and employee CPF contribution rates for older workers were raised, bringing rates for those aged between 50 and 55 on par with those of younger workers, at 37 per cent. But the rates still drop for workers older than 55, and range from 12.5 per

cent to 26 per cent of wages, and there have been calls to raise these.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Christopher Gee noted that while the rationale for the reduction is to keep older workers attractive to employers, it inadvertently brands them as "older", and presumes pay should be lower just because they have passed 55.

"It also has little relationship to the worker's actual productivity and value to the employer," he said.

To help workers cope with the transforming economy and to encourage bosses to retrain workers, there are also skills training subsidies and job placement help such as the Career-Support Programme focusing on mature workers.

Other measures to encourage bosses to employ older workers include wage subsidies in the form of the Special Employment Credit, which offsets 3 to 11 per cent of wages for workers aged 55 and over, who earn up to \$4,000 a month.

Companies can use WorkPro

grants to implement job redesign projects, age management practices and flexible work arrangements.

New guidelines were rolled out last year under the Tripartite Standard on Age-Friendly Workplace Practices, which firms can voluntarily adopt. They include avoiding using age as a recruitment selection criterion and appointing a member of senior management to champion age-friendly workplace practices.

Joanna Seow



Small boats crowd the waters near Kyaukphyu's commuter harbour in Rakhine state, Myanmar, where the people got 24-hour power supply only last year, and families still need to send their young away to find work.



A farmer carrying hay in the setting sun. Fences popping up on surrounding plots remind them of China-driven changes to come and for some locals the Chinese money offers much needed development to Myanmar's second-poorest state.



On Maday Island, a strategic township by the Indian Ocean fast turning into a linchpin of China's initiative where oil tankers can unload petrol that is pumped across 771km of pipelines across Myanmar to Yunnan, Chinese characters affixed to a chain-link fence declare that "One Belt One Road has reached Maday Island".

Hope and fear in Myanmar town seen as next Chinese outpost

China-driven changes bring promises of jobs and progress to some but unease to others



Tan Hui Yee

Indochina Bureau Chief

KYAUKPHYU (Rakhine state, Myanmar) • Rocky trails running behind waterfront shacks end abruptly in neat avenues with lamp posts bearing auspicious Chinese knots and tassels.

Nearby, Chinese characters on a chain-link fence declare: "One Belt One Road reaches Maday Island." It's a message mostly lost on villagers in this corner of Myanmar's Rakhine state who got 24-hour power supply only last year, and who still need to send their young away to find work. But fences popping up on surrounding plots remind them of more China-driven changes to come.

Maday is part of Kyaukphyu, a strategic township by the Indian Ocean fast turning into a linchpin of China's Belt and Road Initiative to widen its reach in regional economies. Here, 300,000-tonne supertankers unload Middle Eastern oil that is pumped through a 771km pipeline crossing Myanmar's mountainous interior to the Chinese province of Yunnan.

A new deep sea port 70 per cent owned by a Chinese-led consortium is being built. It will be complemented by a special economic zone (SEZ) – also majority owned by the Chinese – which the authorities say will create 100,000 jobs.

And ground surveys have started on a high-speed railway that will eventually link Kyaukphyu to Yunnan.

For the Chinese, the port will be a strategic outpost in the Indian Ocean and will provide an alternative route for energy imports to China, bypassing potential choke points in the Malacca Strait. The Kyaukphyu projects will spur growth in China's poor south-western region.

For some locals in Rakhine, the Chinese money offers much needed development and prominence to Myanmar's second-poorest state. "Kyaukphyu is (Myanmar's) gateway to the world," says hotelier Nyeinn Chann Maung.

A "GOOD FRIEND"

Downtown Kyaukphyu is a riot of motorcycle rickshaws and tea shops, still a far cry from the message parlours, casinos and towering resorts turning Cambodia's Sihanoukville city into a Chinese outpost.

Still, on New Year's Day, Mandarin charter drifts across the breakfast hall at Varanathi hotel owned by Mr Nyeinn Chann Maung. The Kyaukphyu power bro-

ker makes it a point to tell this reporter upfront that he is not ethnic Chinese.

But China, he says, is Myanmar's good friend. "And good friends will not help if they are not given any benefits."

Beijing has given Naypyitaw much diplomatic ballast over the past year as the international community heaped condemnation on Myanmar for its treatment of Rohingya people in northern Rakhine state.

These Muslims, regarded as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, already faced debilitating curbs on their movement before a Rohingya insurgent attack in August 2017 triggered a scorched-earth response by the military. Some 700,000 Rohingya fled across the border to Bangladesh, leaving behind homes that they say were deliberately razed by the security officials.

Amid opposition from Naypyitaw, a United Nations fact-finding team last year presented accounts of torture, murder and gang rape, and recommended this be referred to the International Criminal Court. China, as a veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council, has resisted sanctions on Myanmar. Last year, it even proposed slashing the US\$28 million (S\$38 million) funding approved by the UN General Assembly to gather evidence for future criminal proceedings, reported Human Rights Watch.

In an e-mailed response to The Sunday Times, the Chinese embassy in Myanmar called the Rakhine state crisis "an issue between Myanmar and Bangladesh".

"The Rakhine state issue involves a complicated history," it said. "The Chinese side is not in support of any approaches that may complicate, worsen, or internationalise the issue."

Beijing, which has donated 1,100 pre-fabricated homes and 200 million kyat (S\$175,332) as resettlement aid, has prioritised order and economic development.

"China is strengthening cooperation with Myanmar to build the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone, so as to promote people's livelihood and overall development in Rakhine State," the embassy said.

But Kyaukphyu was in Beijing's sights long before the crisis. In 2009, as the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Myanmar's then military regime to build an oil pipeline from Kyaukphyu to Yunnan, Chinese state-owned investment group Citic inked a separate MOU to build a deep sea port and railway network in the Kyaukphyu SEZ.

The latter deal gained no traction. Public resentment against the Chinese – known for riding roughshod over local concerns by dealing exclusively with the previous junta – bubbled over as Myanmar eventually opened its doors to the West.

Beijing's position on the Rakhine crisis is now helping China win back some goodwill, notes Ms Khin Khin Kyaw Kyee, an analyst with Yangon think-tank Institute for Strategy and Policy.

While Western investors hesi-



Source: SCMP SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

Downtown Kyaukphyu with its motorcycle rickshaws and tea shops is still a far cry from the message parlours, casinos and towering resorts turning Cambodia's Sihanoukville city into a Chinese outpost. ST PHOTOS: TAN HUI YEE

tated and European tourists stayed away, the Chinese ploughed in, signing an MOU last year on a wide-ranging "China-Myanmar Economic Corridor", and concluding financing arrangements for the Kyaukphyu deep sea port.

RAKHINE INTERESTS

In Rakhine state, Chinese investment stirs a mixture of hope and unease. Ethnic Rakhines, who allege that their own struggles have been ignored amid the clamour for justice for the Rohingyas, fear they will bear the biggest cost of this geopolitical quid pro quo. This frustration is infused with deep suspicion of the central government which, like the military, is dominated by the ethnic Bamar majority.

"Our grandfathers and fathers fought British colonialists. They believed if we got independence, their grandsons and sons would be free persons," Arakan National Party general-secretary Htun Aung Kyaw tells The Sunday Times. "But under the control of the government, we

don't get sufficient support."

Rakhine state traces its roots to the Arakan kingdom that was conquered by the Bamar two centuries ago. In the landmark 2015 election, where the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a sweeping nationwide victory, voters here bucked the tide by handing the biggest share of state parliament seats to the Arakan National Party.

On the dusty streets of state capital Sittwe, people openly root for the Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine armed group that has bogged the military down in fierce skirmishes. It attacked four police posts on Jan 4, killing 13 police officers. "They are fighting for us and our opportunities," proclaims Mr Maung Ko Naing, 31, a businessman.

Unemployment drives Rakhine youth to leave home for some of the most arduous jobs. They are known to scavenge for scraps of jade in the landslide-prone mines of northern Kachin state.

Seeking better options, Maday Island native Maung Than once tried to enter Malaysia for work but was locked up by a human smuggler in Thailand after his family failed to send enough money for his onward passage. He escaped after three hungry days, and walked six days to Malaysia.

Now trading seafood back home, he says pickings are slim for fellow

villagers despite their proximity to the Chinese oil facility.

"Most of the Myanmar workers there come from places like Mandalay and Yangon. Only a few of them are really local," he says. Whenever a tanker rolls in, fishermen are barred from the vicinity, deepening their anxiety about the future.

Upper House parliamentarian Htoot May says the government bears part of the blame for mismanaging the local impact of past projects. In the mountainous Ann township, for example, some farmers are still sore about being relocated for the Chinese oil pipelines without advance notice.

A grim-looking Mr Tin Hlaing points to the ribbon of scrubby growth cutting across otherwise verdant hills which indicated where trenches were dug for pipes beneath. Part of it used to be his village graveyard. "We tried to stop them," he says. "But the workers said they had permission from the government. The Chinese didn't talk to us. They didn't respect us Arakanese people."

The CNPC did not respond to The Sunday Times' queries.

In a Kyaukphyu tea shop by the future SEZ, worried farmers strain to voice their doubts over the thumping tunes from a nearby truck crammed with inebriated youth on

their way to a new year party.

Having received no visits from the authorities – save for officials who came to survey their land – they fear their plots would be confiscated without notice. And they fret that jobs will eventually go to Chinese or Myanmar citizens from other regions. "I hope my 14-year-old grandson can get a job here," says Mr Lu Pu, 75.

AN NEW CHAPTER?

About half of Myanmar's foreign debt is owed to China. Since coming into power, the NLD government has been mulling over bilateral deals inked by its predecessors, most notably increasing Myanmar's stake in Kyaukphyu's deep sea port project and sizing down the cost of the first phase to US\$1.3 billion (S\$1.8 billion) to manage national debt.

As Naypyitaw's diplomatic room shrinks, analyst Khin Khin Kyaw Kyee fears it may rush into one-sided deals. "Once these investments are embedded, it will be hard for Myanmar to turn back, even if there may be further negotiations down the road," she says.

But Rakhine state's minister for planning, finance, tax and economy, Mr Kyaw Aye Thein, is adamant that foreign investors will not get a free reign. "We will not allow companies to

act irresponsibly in Rakhine," he tells The Sunday Times. "The Chinese investors will conduct their business with transparency, and according to international norms."

Most locals want the SEZ up and running as soon as possible, he says. "We plan to open many training centres when the project starts. Depending on their education level, they can get jobs after getting trained."

Businessman Nyeinn Chann Muang has other ideas. He leads this reporter through a new two-storey red-bricked dormitory near his hotel which will start boarding teenagers in Kyaukphyu this year. Funded by donations, they will be trained in business and politics, and groomed to be future leaders.

"People believe that China will take over Rakhine state one day," he says, stepping through the doorway under a plaque that marks the building as a donation of Yunnan Aid. "To prevent that, we need programmes like this."

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SCAN TO WATCH Chinese interest in Myanmar's Rakhine state brings hope, unease <http://str.sg/kyauk>

Allow phones and photos to help prisoners rehabilitate

Eric Allison

These are dark days in a country torn by Brexit and years of austerity, which have widened the gap between rich and poor. And few places are as gloomy as the prison system, where shocking levels of violence and drug abuse mean there are few positives for those tasked with inspecting the penal estate.

It was a pleasant change, then, to hear of a scheme being praised by Britain's chief inspector of prisons, Mr Peter Clarke.

Like most good ideas, this one is simple: Prisoners in Lowdham Grange in Nottinghamshire can have their photographs taken with their family in a photo booth set up in the visiting area.

The prison is privately run by Serco, which says the practice – introduced last March – will help children and other family members have a more positive experience when visiting the jail.

Many of the men serving their sentences at Lowdham will have been locked up for many years and, mugshots apart, will not have faced a camera since the gates closed on them. This light touch of normality will help their families and friends keep up with the passage of time.

Prison watchers have known for years that strong family ties are, by far, the biggest single factor in reducing reoffending. Yet, in many ways, the system seems set on severing those familial connections.

Prisoners are often housed in remote locations, making visits difficult. In most prisons, the only telephone access is during noisy association periods, via card phones installed on the landings.

This makes the chances of a private conversation virtually impossible – while the limited recreational periods, cut to the bone over the weekends, mean family members are often not at home when prison inmates have access to a phone.

It should come as no surprise to learn that jails in Britain are humming to the tune of illegal mobile phones – thousands of them are confiscated in prisons across England and Wales every year.

Much of the media says these smuggled devices enable prisoners to continue their criminal careers while they are incarcerated: I am sure that's true in some cases – we are talking about convicted criminals here.

But all the evidence I have gathered suggests strongly that the majority of illicit phones inside are used simply to maintain contact with family and friends – privately and at times that are convenient.

Proof of this comes in the fact that relatively few mobile devices are seized in the small number of prisons that have in-cell phones that the inmates can use around the clock.

Like many who support penal reform, I find the notion of making profit from punishment distasteful.

But there is no denying that the private prison sector has introduced innovative schemes that benefit inmates and their families.

Serco was the first prison provider of in-cell phones in Britain in 2010.

When I wrote about this in 2011, a prison service spokesman said it was "exploring the possibilities of pilot installations of in-cell phones in a state-run establishment, as we recognise the advantages and benefits of such a system".

Only 20 jails in England and Wales operate a decent and humane system of prisoners being able to phone home when they choose to (last year, the British government announced £7 million (S\$12.2 million) in funding and plans to extend the scheme to 20 more prisons).

Less than a handful are run by the prison service. One of these is Berwyn, near Wrexham – it opened in 2017 and will, when it becomes fully operational, be the biggest prison in Europe.

In a further dramatic shift – at least as far as public perception is concerned – all newly built jails will no longer have bars on the windows, according to recent reports. They will be replaced by toughened glass, designed to be more secure and drone-proof.

A study has found prison bars to be "punitive and institutional" and their removal will "normalise the prison environment".

Another government study is examining whether calling male prisoners "men" and cells "rooms", among other adjustments in terms, will help towards rehabilitation.

I have my doubts, because we already know what truly works – fostering family ties. Which brings me back to in-cell phones. As well as being humane, they are safe. All calls are monitored and easily recorded, numbers are pre-approved – and paid for by the inmates, of course.

But at the rate of progress of "exploring the possibilities" of their use in jails run by the prison service, it will be a long time before all prisoners and their families can access them. Or, for that matter, years before they can simply pose for family snapshots in the institutions controlled by the very state that sends people into custody. THE GUARDIAN

A study has found prison bars to be "punitive and institutional" and their removal will "normalise the prison environment". Another government study is examining whether calling male prisoners "men" and cells "rooms", among other adjustments in terms, will help towards rehabilitation. I have my doubts, because we already know what truly works – fostering family ties.

NOT STOPPING THEM

We tried to stop them. But the workers said they had permission from the government. The Chinese didn't talk to us. They didn't respect us Arakanese people.



MR TIN HLAING on how trenches were dug for pipes in what used to be his village graveyard.

What's Trending

The good, the bad and the ugly of airline food

Dedicated Instagram accounts let users snap and share photos of their meals and rate them



Ong Hwee Hwee

Digital Editor

Michelin-starred chef Gordon Ramsay refuses to eat it. Most people make do with it. But some actually like it. We are talking about airline food. Love it or hate it, everyone seems to have an opinion on it. And some take what they eat at 40,000ft seriously. Dedicated accounts on Instagram – which is more commonly associated with fancy food than plane food – have been created for travellers to share and rate inflight culinary options. These accounts include well-followed ones such as @inflightfeed, and newer ones like @airplanefoodselfie. The latter, which was created in June last year, crowdsources photos of airline food from travellers, and invites followers to rate each meal on a score of one to 10. Each picture is accompanied by information such as flight number and route. So far, it has about 300 photos and close to 12,000 followers. Most of the drool-worthy pictures were contributed by business



Photos of airline meals on Instagram range from delectable to less than appetising. (Clockwise, from top left) A lunch meal served by Japan Airlines, a business class lunch on Air Europa, an American Air first class meal, and an economy class meal served on Brazil's Azul Airlines. PHOTOS: INFLIGHTFEED/INSTAGRAM, BRIANKELLY/INSTAGRAM, AIRPLANEFOODSELFIE/INSTAGRAM



US Democratic congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was the subject of a fake nude selfie circulating on online forums. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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The week's top 3 picks at [straitstimes.com](#)

VIDEO: Passion takes flight
Civil servant Carlos Ong's miniature kites are not merely decorative ornaments, but can also fly. [str.sg/butterflykite](#)

VIDEO: Sibling harmony
Sisters who have played in the Singapore Symphony Orchestra for almost 30 years tell us how they got their start. [str.sg/SSOsisters](#)

VIDEO: Hangout with ST
Topics include the Singapore Bicentennial and new beginnings for the eight merged junior colleges. [str.sg/hangout46](#)

class passengers. One of the photos shows a Swedish smorgasbord with roast beef, cheese and more, served in a pretty box to Scandinavian Airlines' business class passengers. "Looks better than a lot of business class food!" an Instagram user commented. Another photo, which has 983 likes, shows a tastefully arranged seafood main course and sticks of satay. A user gave the meal – taken by a Singapore Airlines' business

class passenger – a score of eight. "Oh wow! This is really well presented. So elegant!" But the meal that attracted the most likes – about 1,100 – is something less fancy: a salad and bread roll served in the cockpit for the pilot of Austrian Airlines. But not all images posted are of food porn quality. A JetBlue economy class snack pack with items such as salami, corn crisps and M&M's chocolates drew this comment: "Pathetic. A 0 from me." Mr Henry Wu, who created the Instagram account, told MailOnline he used to live in Chicago but now "travels full time". He said: "A lot of other people probably also take pictures of airplane food when they travel like I do but never know what to do with them, so I'm giving them a channel to showcase (the photos)." @inflightfeed is another Instagram account dedicated to airplane food. Created in 2012, it features photos taken by plane food expert Nikos Loukas. The account, which has about 500 posts and 25,500 followers, has a website too. Mr Loukas also compiles an annual list of top 10 airline meals. His 2018 list, which features both business and economy class food, includes:

- Turkish Airlines' business class meal of a ravioli dish and a fig chocolate mousse;
- Japan Airlines' bento box with dishes like tuna sashimi and bonito broth jelly with caviar;
- Aeroflot's economy class meal which came with praynik, a type of Russian spiced cookie.

But more meal choices may not necessarily be good news for passengers. According to a study, the average Briton consumes nearly twice the

recommended daily intake of calories while heading to their destinations. People tend to eat and drink more while flying because cabin pressure, dry air and loud engine noise make it difficult to taste and smell. People may also consume as much as a third more food with the inflight entertainment on, said Oxford professor Charles Spence, author of *Gastrophysics: The New Science Of Eating*. There is also the combination of boredom and free food. Prof Spence said in a 2017 interview: "With nothing else to do, food becomes an appealing distraction." Gordon Ramsay may be right to stay away from airplane food.

HOW FOOT FETISHISTS DEBUNKED A FAKE NUDE SELFIE For weeks, a photo had been making the rounds on online forums. The selfie, taken in a bathtub, shows a woman's legs from the shin down and her lilac-painted toenails. A reflection of the woman's body can be seen in the bathtub's faucet. Overlaid on the photo is the text "alexandria ocasio-cortez. instagram.post.9-3-2016". Rumours soon spread that the woman in the picture was US Democratic congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 29, who was recently sworn in as the youngest woman ever elected to the US House of Representatives. Last Monday, right-wing US news site The Daily Caller posted the photo, with the headline: "Here's the photo some people described as a nude selfie of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez". Unknown to the news site, the fake news had already been debunked – unexpectedly – by a group of foot fetishists. Contributors of the site wikiFeet, which collects photos showing female celebrities' feet, did some cross-checking and concluded that the feet pictured in the selfie were not Ms Ocasio-Cortez's. Commenting on the photo which was also posted on a Reddit forum, user jokes_on_you wrote: "I'm a contributor to wikiFeet and even I have never seen a second toe like that!" The comment included a link to a photo showing the congresswoman wearing sandals, reported news site Vice. It turned out that the woman in the photo is in fact Ms Sydney Leathers, who was embroiled in a sexting scandal with former New York representative Anthony Weiner. The nude selfie incident came after an old video of Ms Ocasio-Cortez dancing in her Boston University days was leaked. The clip, which surfaced before she was sworn in, was widely viewed as an effort to embarrass her. Ms Ocasio-Cortez has lashed out at The Daily Caller, calling its behaviour "completely disgusting". She tweeted after the saga: "Women in leadership face more scrutiny. Period."

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#OpinionOfTheDay

Singapore's Bicentennial: Our colonial conundrum



Tee Zhuo

I'll be honest: I hate the statue; the haughty "I came, I saw, I conquered" pose. I've always fantasised about someone splashing paint over his ugly fake marble face. Seeing it actually done was quite cathartic. I'm talking about the Bicentennial's "disappearing Raffles" stunt, of course. Just 30 years ago, that would have been high sacrilegious. Part of the statue's sanctity comes from the equally sacrosanct myth engraved on its plinth: "(Raffles) with genius and perception changed the

destiny of Singapore from an obscure fishing village to a great seaport and modern metropolis." This symbolic act of touching the previously untouchable is highly valuable. First, it sends a message: The 1819 narrative is not gospel truth. Second, it signals a welcome shift in the Government's approach on the Singapore story – from a lesson it needs to teach Singaporeans to a tale woven with them through conversation. Indeed, the Singapore Bicentennial Office (SBO) has taken pains to present the Bicentennial as commemorative and reflective, rather than celebratory. It also decided to feature not just the 200 years since, but also the 500 years before 1819. Yes, it's awkward that something called the Bicentennial is looking at 700 years of history, and the SBO has received some flak for this. But I'd take the awkward semantics over an entire year of "When Sir Stamford Raffles landed..." any time. At an Institute of Policy Studies-Nathan lecture delivered last September, historian Tan Tai Yong argued that this allows us to explore alternative narratives. "To insist that everything that happened before (1819) is irrelevant is inaccurate. A... *longue duree* approach... will help uncover long-term change and continuity," said Professor Tan, who is

president of Yale-NUS College and a member of the Bicentennial advisory panel. **QUESTIONS LEFT UNASKED** It was a pity the Raffles stunt wasn't more permanent. The statue is now, regrettably, back to its gleaming white, good as new. This was perhaps an omen: Some fundamental assumptions would be left uncontested – for example, the view that Raffles and British colonialism should be mainly seen as a patron of Singapore's modern success. A Straits Times Forum letter on Friday said it all with the headline: "Don't rob colonial British of credit due them." The reader argues the colonials' "non-altruistic motives should not cloud our understanding of the objective contributions made to modern Singapore". "Non-altruistic" is a poor euphemism for exploitation, and "objective" has ever been the mask of the tyrant. Colonialism did bring trade, laws and infrastructure – for the prosperity of the British. For many of our forebears, it also marked poverty, pain and humiliation. What about the "companions" that were made to stand by Raffles' statue? Aren't they, as the SBO says, part of "a huge cast of contributors"? Munshi Abdullah was a Malay language teacher for Raffles, and

went so far as to describe the latter as a parent. Naraina Pillai came with Raffles on the same ship. He was chief clerk of the treasury for the colonial establishment, and was eventually given land by Raffles himself. Tan Tock Seng was one of Singapore's founding *kapitan cina*, local Chinese elites used by colonial powers in South-east Asia to extract taxes and keep other Chinese in line. Notice any similarities? Yes, all of them are pioneers, but they were also part of a colonial regime that profited off a subjugated populace. This doesn't make them "evil". But it does mean the well-publicised narrative of their nation-building and philanthropy is not the only or whole story. **COLONIAL HANGOVER** Those "companions" were all subjects of the Empire, so we might cut them some slack. But what about Raffles himself? Before he so graciously "found" us, Raffles led a violent assault in 1812 on Yogyakarta, killing civilians, looting and humiliating its local rulers. Yet here, he is today associated ubiquitously and proudly with excellence. The financial district is called Raffles Place. A top school and prestigious hospital are named after him. More disturbingly, we've taken to aping colonialism's legacy of excess and

avarice in our consumer culture. A condominium blatantly named Park Colonial, for example, marketing itself with colonial nostalgia. That same nostalgia reflected in the imperial fantasy of Raffles Hotel, still proudly celebrating its "distinctive" Sikh doormen, a racist relic of the era. And remember that "Empire Ball" fiasco at the National Art Gallery in 2016? Few nations would fondly remember, much less glorify a former oppressor. We must suffer from some kind of Stockholm syndrome, a psychological condition where captives grow to feel affection for their captor and even rationalise their violence. But our current condition was deliberately and methodically induced for pragmatic concerns. Mr Lee Kuan Yew made the decision to retain Raffles' statue, for example, to publicly show acceptance of colonial legacy and thus send a positive signal to investors. Historians Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli argue in a 2008 book that the freshly minted post-colonial Government believed emphasising the pre-1819 past would unhelpfully emphasise differences in a diverse migrant population, and lead to Malay nativist claims. It decided on an "unencumbered future": painting colonialism as the direct benefactor of modern Singapore.

Prof Tan notes that this "straight arrow trajectory" made sense from the nation-building perspective of our early years. The question is, does it still make sense now? **NO SACRED COLONIAL COWS** "Not just Raffles" is a good start, but it isn't enough. A sincere conversation about our own past needs to also ask: Why Raffles? Of course, there's a whole year of Bicentennial programming to come. And to its credit, the SBO has tirelessly engaged Singaporeans on its public channels, like Facebook. I, for one, will be interested to see what spaces emerge for further contestation of our past, especially beyond a narrow sense of "nation-building". Everyone likes a feel-good story: These immigrants came from all these places, but they all united and built Singapore with the help of the colonial British. The truth, however, is rarely pure and never simple. To shy away from unpleasant answers is to insult the memory of those who lived under the colonial yoke. It is also to do ourselves a disservice. Proper introspection of our collective national psyche demands that we should have no sacred cows – even if we have to shatter the chief white colonial in shining marble himself.

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Asia's technocratic future

The question for Asian societies is not whether they are becoming more democratic, but whether governments are well-placed to deal with challenges of the future

Parag Khanna

Between mid-2018 and mid-2019, more than two billion Asians will have gone to the polls in national elections, from Pakistan and Bangladesh last year to the upcoming elections in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Clearly, Asia is not a monolithic authoritarian challenge to Western democracy! Outside of China and several small countries, democratic politics is very much the norm. Furthermore, almost all societies in the world today declare national agendas of social inclusion, and governments – both democratic and otherwise – feel growing pressure to deliver on their promises through the twin forces of transparency and accountability. This applies as much to South Korea's elected leaders as to the military junta in Thailand.

Post-ideological global discourse

Global political discourse is shifting onto a post-ideological terrain where performance – based on measurements of high-quality governance and citizen satisfaction – is the arbiter of success. All societies want a balance of prosperity and liveability, openness and protection, effective governance and citizen voice, individualism and cohesion, free choice and social welfare. Everyday people don't measure these things by how democratic their country is but by whether they feel safe in their cities, can afford their homes, have stability in their work, have a plan for growing old, and can remain connected to friends and family. As in natural evolution, success and failure are determined not by preconceived theories but by adaptability.

The question we in Asia must ask ourselves therefore is not whether we are becoming more democratic in character, but whether we are evolving into governments capable of addressing complex 21st-century challenges at the intersection of geopolitical turbulence, economic volatility, social inequity, technological disruption, and environmental fragility. The answer to that question hinges less on how democratic a system is and more on how technocratic it is.

The Anglo-American failure

The term democracy tells us even less about how – or how well – a country is run. From Mexico to Italy, democracies today are the places where surveys show that populations have the least trust in and respect for politicians and for democracy.

In Russia, Turkey, and Iran, elections are merely instruments of pacification, release valves that buy breathing space for regimes. Rule of law, meaning that laws are above the executive, looks more like rule by law, in which governments abuse the law as a tool of power.

Two decades ago, in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, Western intellectuals confidently presumed that Asian strongman rule would break down amid economic empowerment and rising demands for democracy. Now they fear that their own systems are regressing into either strongman rule or rulerless democratic chaos.

If economic growth is the foundation on which liberal democracy is built, the West's chronically slow growth foretold today's populism – despite its illogical and counterproductive arguments and consequences.

Simply put: The Anglo-American free market political economy will never recover its pre-eminent stature. Indeed, in recent years, I have noticed that even when Western analysts and commentators are speaking to each other on panels or debates and are asked point-blank which countries they feel have an admirable vision and strategy for their future, they almost always answer China, India and Singapore.

As the Anglo-American political constellation veers off course, it could learn from Asia's leading systems, which focus on long-term vision and collective benefits rather than short-term hyper-individualism and narrow special interests. In



Across Asia, the most admired and closely studied government today is that of Singapore (above). Asians look to Singapore's technocratic approach to responding to citizens' needs, learning from international experience in devising policies, and using data and scenarios for long-term planning. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR



Tiananmen square in Beijing. Chinese citizens have far more respect for their government than Americans do. As a Chinese scholar said: "Chinese people don't love their government, but they trust it." PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



A New Year's Eve party in Manila. In the Philippines, officials now speak not just of public-private partnerships (PPPs) but also add a fourth P: public-private partnerships for the people. PHOTO: REUTERS

the aftermath of Brexit, numerous British ministers and economists offered hope in the notion that the United Kingdom would become the "Singapore of Europe" – never mind the irony of looking up to a former colony as a role model.

Singapore as a technocratic icon

Across Asia, from Moscow to Muscat and from Dubai to Beijing, the most admired and closely studied government today is that of Singapore. Many Asians can relate to its colonial inheritance of a parliamentary system. Numerous Asian nations also had one very strong post-colonial leader who shepherded them through the vulnerable early decades, though none as charismatic and effective as Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew. Asians far and wide look to Singapore's technocratic approach to responding efficiently to citizens' needs and preferences, learning from international experience in devising policies, and using data and scenarios for long-term planning. The Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy exists to inculcate these methods into Singaporeans and rising officials from around the world.

When I travel to countries such as Oman, Georgia, the UAE, Kazakhstan, or dozens of other aspiring

with Chinese characteristics" (now enshrined in the Chinese Constitution) suggests. As a result, the government is far more self-correcting than earlier iterations, demonstrating policy agility in the handling of internal and external crises.

Provincial chiefs, business executives, and academic experts are actively consulted to chart the country's economic restructuring, resulting in pro-entrepreneurship reforms across the country.

The scholar Jessica Teets calls this model "consultative authoritarianism". Entrenched despots could potentially benefit from aspects of the China model if that means focusing on infrastructure, education, health care, technology, and all the other things China has done right. Chinese citizens, not surprisingly, have far more respect for their government than Americans do. As one Chinese scholar remarked, "Chinese people don't love their government, but they trust it".

Can Asia's democracies graduate to technocracy?

Most Asian publics know all too well how long their mafia politics has masqueraded as democracy. Because India, Indonesia and the Philippines have each endured decades of forgettable or regrettable governments, they have all in recent years elected leaders with explicitly technocratic pretensions.

Indians, Indonesians and Filipinos are no longer content to be part of a vibrant commercial society with a dysfunctional government. Fed up with patronising clichés about how they thrive despite their governments, they have voted in leaders with no-nonsense agendas focused on accountability in public affairs and a less corrupt environment for business, as well as major investments in infrastructure, jobs, education and health care.

At the same time, these three countries have climbed the most places among Asian countries between 2010 and 2016 in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index for their growing political inclusiveness.

But make no mistake about the causality: They have become more inclusive because of the technocratic steps they have taken, not because of any changes in their electoral practices.

Think about it: These three countries have had functional democracies for at least a generation, but only now is the world paying attention to their progress in introducing digital ID cards, cutting red tape, and establishing special economic zones – all ideas that have come from technocratic leaders.

Daily political life in many Asian countries is consumed by concerns over subsidies, security, construction, currency, and other nuts-and-bolts issues – issues the public wants to see better managed. The 1.7 billion citizens of Asia's three largest democracies rightly want to balance their unruly politics with technocratic discipline. They are sufficiently democratic already –

but they are not nearly technocratic enough.

Asia's leaders are rightly more focused on state capacity than on parliamentary proceduralism. Boosting capacity doesn't mean building bloated bureaucracies; Asian governments already have those. It means creating a leaner and more effective government, from streamlined tax policy to online portals for business licensing and procurement. Governments are shrewdly calculating the benefit multinational partners will bring in terms of investment and taxes, jobs and wages, skills and technology. They are getting tougher on domestic incumbents as well, taking a hard line on companies that don't deliver on time by not paying until construction projects are complete.

In the Philippines, officials now speak not just of public-private partnerships (PPPs) but also add a fourth P: public-private partnerships for the people.

The term Asian values used to imply deference to authority by a condescending government. But since the 1980s, Asians have demonstrated that even entrenched elites can be confronted and ousted once the population is sufficiently fed up with their rent-seeking profligacy.

Asians have traded in their infatuation with the gilded class for single-minded demands for quality governance. Becoming more liberal and democratic does not mean that they will fail to toss out ineffective elected leaders in favour of technocratic doers.

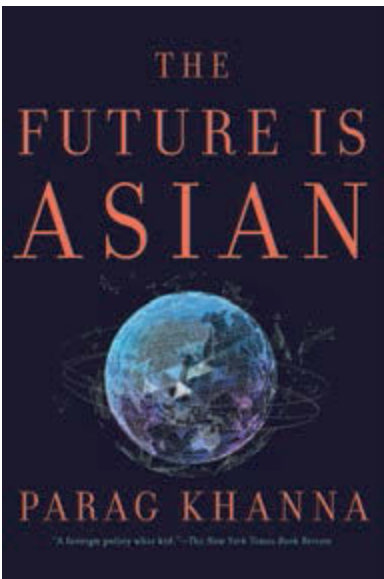
Thailand's military junta, which took power in 2014, has found strong support within a highly liberal society for its management of the country – for the time being.

India's Narendra Modi has already suffered electoral defeats in some states. It is refreshing that upstart political movements – from the cricket star Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party to the millennial-driven Future Forward Party in Thailand – have been holding leaders' feet to the fire, demanding greater transparency and accountability in government, and motivating throngs of youth to become politically engaged. To deserve to be elected, however, these new parties need meaningful policy platforms and talented managers capable of implementing them.

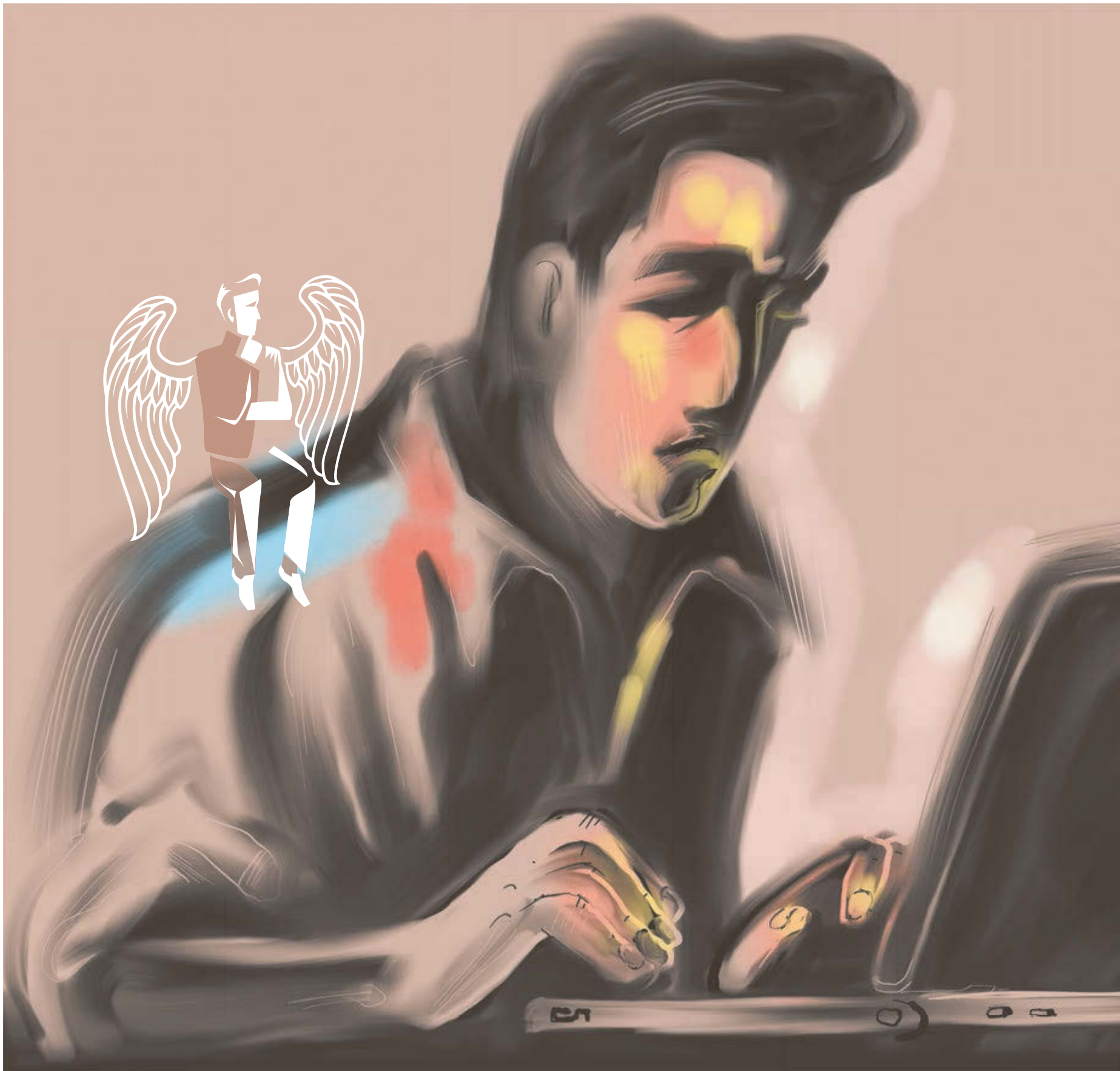
The bottom line is that across Asia, rising incomes, technological penetration, and generational change are enabling greater social and economic freedom – but politics remains fairly controlled, because regimes like it that way and, to a large degree, people do as well.

The desire for stability and social order is as natural to humans as the desire for freedom. Large, diverse, fragile postcolonial Asian countries have no desire to adopt American-style democracy if it will put at risk the stability on which societal progress – and successful democratisation – depend.

Asians realise that there is such a thing as too much freedom and that responsibility is just as important a word in healthy societies.



This excerpt is adapted from Parag Khanna's new book, *The Future Is Asian* (Simon & Schuster, 2019), now out in bookstores. It retails for \$29.95 at Kinokuniya in stores and online. He will be speaking on the book at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy on Jan 16 at 5.30pm.



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

Must writers be moral? Their contracts may require it

**‘No way. I’m not signing that,’
a New Yorker writer said
when she saw the terms.**

Judith Shulevitz

When you see publishers and authors chatting chummily at book parties, you’re likely to think that they’re on the same side – the side of great literature and the free flow of ideas.

In reality, their interests are at odds. Publishers are marketers. They don’t like scandals that might threaten their bottom line – or the bottom lines of the multinational media conglomerates of which most form a small part. Authors are people, often flawed. Sometimes they behave badly. How, for instance, should publishers deal with the #MeToo era, when accusations of sexual impropriety can lead to books being pulled from shelves and syllabuses, as happened last year with the novelists Junot Diaz and Sherman Alexie?

One answer is the increasingly widespread “morality clause”. Over the past few years, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins and Penguin Random House have added such clauses to their standard book contracts. I’ve heard that Hachette Book Group is debating putting one in its trade book contracts, though the publisher wouldn’t confirm it. These clauses release a company from the obligation to publish a book if, in the words of Penguin Random House, “past or future conduct of the author inconsistent with the author’s reputation at the time this agreement is executed comes to light and results in sustained, widespread public condemnation of the author that materially diminishes the sales potential of the work”. That is reasonable, I guess. Penguin, to its credit, doesn’t ask authors to return their advances. But other publishers do, and some are even more hard-nosed.

This past year, regular contributors to Conde Nast magazines started spotting a new paragraph in their yearly contracts. It’s a doozy. If, in the company’s “sole judg-

ment”, the clause states, the writer “becomes the subject of public disrepute, contempt, complaints or scandals,” Conde Nast can terminate the agreement. In other words, a writer need not have done anything wrong; she need only become scandalous. In the age of the Twitter mob, that could mean simply writing or saying something that offends some group of strident tweeters.

Agents hate morality clauses because terms like “public condemnation” are vague and open to abuse, especially if a publisher is looking for an excuse to back out of its contractual obligations. When I asked writers about morality clauses, on the other hand, most of them had no idea what I was talking about. You’d be surprised at how many do not read the small print.

One writer who did was the fantasy and science-fiction novelist Ursula K. Le Guin, who died last year. When she discovered the morality clause in her HarperCollins contract in 2011, she posted a satirical letter from a fictional writer confessing sins to Rupert Murdoch, who owns the company: “It was nothing really materially damaging, only just the money and ID. I stole from the old man with the walker and some things I said about some schoolgirls with big tits.”

Please, the letter went on, don’t “make me pay back the money because I can’t because I already had to give most of it to some stupid lawyer who said I had defaulted on a loan and was behind on my child support, which is just a lie. That stupid brat was never mine.”

Harvard Law School professor Jeannie Suk Gersen, who writes regularly for The New Yorker, a Conde Nast magazine, read the small print, too, and thought: “No way. I’m not signing that.” Gersen, an expert in the laws regulating sexuality, often takes stands that may offend the magazine’s liberal readers, as when she defended Education Secretary Betsy DeVos’ rollback of Obama-era rules on campus sexual-assault accusations.

When I called Gersen in November, she said, “No person who is engaged in creative expressive activity should be signing one of these.”

It is not that a company should

have to keep on staff a murderer or rapist, she added. But when the trigger for termination could be a Twitter storm or a letter-writing campaign, she said, “I think it would have a very significant chilling effect.”

Masha Gessen, another New Yorker writer, also said she would not sign her new contract, at least not as it was originally worded. Gessen, a Russian-American journalist who won the 2017 National Book Award for *The Future Is History*, about the return of totalitarianism in post-Communist Russia, has spent her career challenging prevailing nostrums.

Last year, as prominent men fell like bowling pins after being accused of sexual misconduct, Gessen published columns on the New Yorker website describing the #MeToo movement as an “out-of-control ‘moral panic’ bent on policing sexual behaviour by mob justice. Needless to say, many readers did not agree.

“I’m extremely uncomfortable with it,” Gessen said about the contract, “because I have in the past been vilified on social media.”

Having once been fired from a job as the director of Radio Liberty in Russia after what she called a disinformation campaign, she added: “I know what it’s like to lose institutional support when you most need it.”

Both Gersen’s and Gessen’s agents got Conde Nast to tone down the language that offended them, and the writers have now signed. Gessen’s agent made Conde Nast acknowledge “that I have expressed controversial views”, Gessen said, and the morality clause now states that it cannot be invoked as “the result of my professional work”. By “professional work”, she added, she meant public events or posts on social media in addition to her writing.

Gessen said she felt she could stand up to Conde Nast because she has clout. She worries that younger or less famous writers won’t be as empowered.

I share that concern. Over the past four years, I have published articles criticising the concept of safe spaces and deploring the lack of due process in campus rape hear-

ings. I’ve been called transphobic for an essay I wrote in 2016 about the tension between transgender rights and the right to privacy, and I’m still being called that.

If I’d had a book contract with a morality clause when I wrote those, I might have thought twice before indulging my fondness for picking fights.

It is impossible to say how many novelists and journalists have fallen afoul of morality clauses, or, indeed, if any of them have. No one I talked to could or would name a case.

In 2017, Simon & Schuster cancelled a book by the professional provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos after he gave an interview in which he appeared to condone pedophilia. His contract reportedly did not include a morality clause, and he sued, though he later dropped the suit. If a morality clause did lead to a book’s cancellation, we probably would not know it, according to Ms Devereux Chatillon, a partner in the media and intellectual property law firm Chatillon Weiss who has represented both The New Yorker and

Times change; norms change with them. Morality clauses hand the power to censor to publishers, not the government, so they don’t violate the constitutional right to free speech. But that power is still dangerous.

writers. “It wouldn’t be public unless somebody sued over it,” she said. And even then, the lawsuit probably would not come to light.

Morality clauses may be relatively new to mainstream publishing, but they have a long history. The entertainment industry started drafting them in 1921, when the silent-movie star Fatty Arbuckle, who had just signed a then-astonishing US\$1 million contract with Paramount Pictures, was accused of the rape and manslaughter of a girl at a party. Arbuckle was acquitted after two mistrials, but by then the public had soured on him, and the studios wanted out.

Today, the clauses are widespread in sports, television and advertising.

Religious publishers have used them for at least 15 years, which seems fair enough. You cannot condemn a Christian publisher that cancels publication of a book called *The Ridiculously Good Marriage* after the author is accused of having sexually assaulted an underage girl when he was a youth pastor. (He apologised for a “sexual incident”.)

Children’s publishers have been including the clauses for a decade or more, and they, too, have a case. It would be challenging to sell a children’s book written by a pedophile.

Maybe you do not find morality clauses alarming under any circumstances. “If what you’re selling me is your reputation, if that’s what I’m paying you for, then I should not have to pay you” if your reputation tanks, said Mr Rick Kurnit, a partner in Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz, a firm specialising in art and entertainment law.

Maybe you’re asking: Why should anyone get away with being a racist or sexist jerk? What gives Alexie, accused of hitting on women who saw him as a mentor, and Diaz, accused of forcibly kissing someone, the right to have their books published? Or even: Why should opinion writers be allowed to gratuitously insult duly elected officials? If a loudmouth suffers from a backlash, this reasoning goes, he probably deserves it.

The problem with letting publishers back out of contracts with non-celebrity, non-religious, non-children’s book authors on the grounds of immorality is that immorality is a slippery concept. Publishers have little incentive to clarify what they mean by it, and the public is fickle in what it takes umbrage at.

In 1947, the concern was communism, and morality clauses gave studios a way to blacklist the Hollywood 10, a group of directors and screenwriters who denounced the House Un-American Activities Committee as illegitimate and refused to say whether they’d ever been communists. All 10 went to jail, and all but one, who decided to cooperate with the committee, became unemployable until the 1960s, though some continued to write under pseudonyms.

Not long ago, publishers were hailed as countercultural heroes for backing works that offended public sensibilities. Mr Barney Rosset, the publisher of Grove Press, introduced Americans to Samuel Beckett, Jack Kerouac, Malcolm X, Marguerite Duras and Kathy Acker, among scores of other writers considered avant-garde at the time.

Mr Rosset fought doggedly to overturn laws that were preventing him from publishing D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and Henry Miller’s *Tropic Of Cancer*, both of which contained scenes of graphic sex. The *Tropic Of Cancer* case made it to the Supreme Court, which ruled that the book was not obscene. The feminist critic Kate Millet attacked Miller’s novels as misogynistic – she was quite right about that – but that did not stop the PEN American Centre from awarding Mr Rosset a citation for “the free transmission of the printed word across the barriers of poverty, ignorance, censorship and repression.”

Times change; norms change with them. Morality clauses hand the power to censor to publishers, not the government, so they don’t violate the constitutional right to free speech. But that power is still dangerous.

After our conversation, Gersen sent me an e-mail pointing out a possible unintended consequence of the Conde Nast clause. Who are the groups subjected to the most public vitriol for their published work, she asked? Who is most viciously trolled?

Women and members of minorities. “That is one of the realities of publishing while a woman or minority in this age,” she wrote. “The clause is perversely posing more career risk to women and minorities than to white males.”

If all it takes to lose a magazine gig or book deal is to fall into “public disrepute”, it won’t be only villains whose voices are lost. NYTIMES

• Judith Shulevitz, the author of *The Sabbath World: Glimpses Of A Different Order Of Time*, is a contributing opinion writer.

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1800-289-9988 or 6319-5192

OBITUARIES



SEE KAR SENG

Age: 88

passed away peacefully on 11 Jan 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Gan Siew Geok (Deceased)

Sons:

See Ee Kok
See Wee Bin
See Hwee Peng Stanley

Godson:

Wang Hock Heng Stephen

Daughters:

See Jin Ai
See Jin Khun

Grandsons:

See Kai Song
See Kai Shen
See Yi Liang
See Tian-Ying Jeremy
Gan Kim Chern
Luar Chang Ye

God-Grandson:

Wang Wei Cong Darryl

Granddaughters:

See Le-Xuan Hannah
Gan Yuen Fuen Josephine
Gan Yean Leng Lynn
Luar Shu Min
Luar Shu Yi

God-Granddaughters:

Wang Min Charlene
Lin Jia Hui Dawn
Sim Qi Xuan
Luar Si An Josh

God-Great-Grandson:

Kwa Jun He Raphael

Daughters-in-law:

Lee Chooi Fun
Chan May Ling
Teo Hwee Jing Joanna

Goddaughter-in-law:

Loh Siew Chin

Sons-in-law:

Gan Leng Eiat
Luar Eng Ee

Granddaughters-in-law:

Ly Hong Nghi
Lim Ming Rou Michelle

God-Granddaughter-in-law:

Tan Si Ling Joanne

Grandsons-in-law:

Sim Eng Beng
Luar Miang Kwang Keith

God-Grandson-in-law:

Kwa Roger
Great-Granddaughters:
Sim En Qi
Luar Si En Faith
Gan Yong Ting

God-Great-Granddaughter:

Kwa Jin Tong Raelyn

Body is resting at Blk 193 Toa Payoh Lor 4, Multi-Purpose Hall
Cortege will leave on 15 Jan 2019 (Tuesday) at 12:40pm for
Mandai Crematorium for cremation at Hall 3.



Sim Yeong Hak

Age: 88

Passed away peacefully on 12 January 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife:

Doris Wee Bock Neo

Sons:

Sim Chong Boon
Sim Chong Yew
Sim Chong How

Foster Daughter:
Quek Siang Kheng

Foster Son-in-law:
Kwang Chaw Tien

Devoted Foster Father to the Quek Family

Willie Quek & Spouse
Edwin Quek & Spouse
Quek Keng Khwang & Spouse
Quek Swee Keng
Quek Swee Luan & Spouse
Quek Luan Kheng & Spouse

19 Foster Grandchildren & Spouses

Wake is held at Singapore Casket Level 4, Emerald Hall,
131 Lavender Street, Singapore 338737
from Sunday 13 January 2019, 4.00pm onwards.

Cortege leaves on Wednesday 16 January 2019 at 10.00am
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 11.00am.

Om Namah Shivaya



Chandra Anthony

(Former Navy Officer)

Age: 56

Passed away peacefully on
11 January 2019, dearly missed
and remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Mageswari

Daughter: Nandini

Sister: Neela (Vally)

Brothers-in-law & Spouses:

P. Kunasegaran & Banumathi
Karunakaran & Radha
Balasubramaniam & Susela
Manokaran

And all family & friends.

Wake is held at Block 432
Ang Mo Kio Avenue 10 #03-1455,
Singapore 560432.

Cortege leaves on Sunday
13 January 2019 at 5.30pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1
for cremation at 6.30pm.

"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest
in the shadow of the Almighty" Psalm 91:1



ROSIE LIM CHAI LUAN

Age: 86

was called home to be with the Lord on 11 January 2019,
dearly missed by loved ones.

Husband: Yeoh Oon Teng (Deceased)

Sons:

Geoffrey

Steven

Charles

Grandchildren:

Gregory

Genevieve

James

Daughters-in-law:

Mary Wee

Theresa Yap

Lynn Ng

Grandchildren:

Jared

Jessica

Cedric

Shilings, nephews, nieces, relatives and friends.
Wake is held at Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, 50 Ophir Road,
Singapore 188690. Sunday service at 8.15pm.
Cortege will leave on 14 January 2019 (Monday) at 11.20am for
Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 12.10 pm.

ATHMA SHANTI POOJA



Muthu Nedunchezhiyan

(Pattan Kallu Zhiyan)

Departed on 30th December 2018

We, the family wish to express our
heartfelt appreciation to relatives
and friends for their support and
condolences during our recent
bereavement.

Karumathi Prayers will be held on
the night of Sunday 13 January 2019
at Block 211 Boon Lay Place
#04-143, Singapore 640211.

Athma Shanti Prayers will be held
on Monday 14 January 2019 at
7.15pm at Sri Arasakesari Sivan
Temple, 25 Sungei Kadut Avenue
Singapore 729679.

1st Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Neo Thye Tong

Departed on 13 January 2018

Daddy! Gong Gong
In our hearts your memory
lingers. There isn't a day
that we don't think about
you. Words cannot express
how much we miss you

Dearly missed and always
remembered by Mummy
& all your loved ones.



Veerapan Govindamal (Kannu)

Age: 92

Passed away peacefully on 12 January 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Husband: M. Veerapan (deceased)

Sons:

Veerapan Viswanathan
Veerapan Balakrishnan
(Krishnaraja)
Veerapan Asogasivan

Grandsons:

S. Siva Kumar
Magenthiran (Raja)
R. Iswaran
Dakshinamoorthy
Arul Praksam (deceased)
B.Sridhar
Ravi Chandran
Raja Pandi

Great-Grandsons:

Parvin
Sarveshwaran
Rahesh Vetrivel
Nidhish Gabriel

Daughters:

Veerapan Muthuleetchumi
Veerapan Paravathi
Veerapan Radahmani
Veerapan Sarojini

Granddaughters:

R. Mageswari
A. Cynthia

Great-Granddaughters:

Leenann
Aratiruthra
Freya Anushaka
Maya Annsika

And all relatives and friends.

Amma is resting at Block 44 Telok Blangah Drive #09-17,
Singapore 100044 from Sunday 13 January 2019,
10.00am onwards. Tel: 6270 7628

Cortege leaves on Monday 14 January 2019 at 4.30pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 6.30pm.

In Loving Memory Of Our Dearest Dad



M. Rengasamy

Departed on 18 January 2016

Always remembered by
Wife: Rajeswari Rengasamy, Children & Loved Ones

Prayers will be held on Friday 18 January 2019
at 7pm at Sri Sivan Temple Geylang East Ave 2.

Contact 97387380.

Please treat this as a personal invitation

Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust - Psalm 40:4

1st Anniversary

In Loving Memory of

Susan Ann Gek Swee

Departed on 13 January 2018

Your life is a reminder that God works through us.

We miss your smile, your kind actions,

your caring words, your strength.

Thinking of you always.

Dearly missed and lovingly cherished by:

Husband, children, in-laws,

grandchildren and all loved ones



In memory of
a loved one



In memory of
a loved one

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Invest



Me & My Money

Property agent Kelvin Neo has bought and sold several properties, making capital gains along the way. **B12**

7 tips on funding your children's education

Plan early for your child's tertiary needs and maximise returns even as you minimise risks

Lorna Tan
Invest Editor

You don't need to be a Rhodes Scholar to know that many parents here regard their children's tertiary education as a top concern, with some even putting it ahead of their own retirement planning. The harder part of the equation is knowing how to pay for it, given the ever-increasing costs. A recent HSBC Bank report found that 46 per cent of those polled here worry that they do not have

the financial resources to support their kids' education. It also noted Singapore students spend on average \$46,425 over the course of a degree at a local institution – \$10,008 above what their parents are contributing. You can see what's required – careful forward planning to ensure adequate funds to meet tertiary education needs. Mr Anurag Mathur, head of retail banking and wealth management at HSBC Bank (Singapore), notes that Singaporeans place a premium on their children receiving a university education, and they're prepared to pay for it. Parents are taking on extra work, sacrificing holidays and turning to loans to help pay for the full cost of their children's varsity education, according to the HSBC report. Mr Vasu Menon, vice-president and senior investment strategist,

wealth management Singapore at OCBC Bank, says: "At the very least, a couple should start planning financially for their kids the moment they decide to get married and start a family. "Starting early will give them a head start in growing their investments through the power of compounding. The cost of purchasing insurance protection is also lower when you are younger." Financial experts suggest considering a regular investment plan in a well-diversified portfolio of funds providing dividends, together with an endowment plan. Such a plan has the potential to provide higher returns with the advantages of dollar-cost averaging and compounding over time. It can also be liquidated fairly quickly in the event of a financial emergency. The Sunday Times highlights seven tips to help you fund your chil-

dren's education. **1. Start early** Financial experts like Mr Brandon Lam, Singapore head of financial planning group at DBS Bank, say it is best to begin "as soon as possible". Starting to save early and gradually allows more time to reach target funds, thanks to compounding. "If you're a new parent, you might think, "Why should I plan for something that takes place almost two decades down the road?" The reason is, costs will be high, and are expected to continue to rise," he says. **2. Be realistic** Mr Deepak Khanna, head of wealth development at HSBC Bank (Singapore), advises that parents should be realistic about the cost of university education. This means taking into account all the expenses, such as course fees, allowance, trans-

port, food, technology, and so on, when planning how to support their children. It is especially important if they plan to send their children to an overseas university. "While a university education abroad can help their children to be independent and enhance their job prospects, it is vital for parents to adequately plan for all the implications, including higher tuition fees, international travel and exchange rates," Mr Khanna adds. **3. Working out the gaps** Mr Lam suggests identifying the approximate amount needed and the number of years you have to reach that target. A Singapore-based student typically enters university at age 20. The savings target should factor in the increase in fees over the time you start saving to the period when your child is about to enter uni. Based on the average cost of \$40,000 for a Singapore undergraduate education, with an annual inflation rate of 1.6 per cent, the amount in 20 years would stand at about \$55,000. From this, work backwards to determine the amount you need to regularly set aside, taking into account the benefits of compounding interest on your savings over time, says Mr Lam. **4. Protection** Note that it is prudent to prepare and protect against unforeseen circumstances that may affect the continued funding of your child's education. Before you even start investing and growing your funds to achieve your child's estimated education cost, it is important to ensure that you have sufficient insurance protection for yourself, says Mr Menon. "(This) is critical because you

don't want to leave your spouse and children financially stranded if the unfortunate happens and you pass on or become incapacitated, especially if you are a major bread winner," he advises. Coverage for death, total permanent disability, disability and critical illnesses are some categories of insurance to buy. **5. Saving** Parents should try to save at least 10 per cent of their monthly income and look to invest and grow this after setting aside an emergency fund to tide them over unexpected events like a job loss that can cause cash flow problems, says Mr Menon. "Saving and squirrelling away savings into a bank account may not be the best option if you are working at building a pool of funds for your child's future needs. Investing and growing your savings are important to beat inflation," he adds. **6. Endowment insurance** Parents can consider investing in an endowment insurance plan that provides a lump sum payout when the child turns 21. Such a policy provides a guaranteed return on a specified date as long as you make the fixed monthly payments. If you should die before the policy matures, your child will receive a death payout that could fund university needs. So an endowment plan can be seen as a disciplined approach to savings and forms a stable base in your portfolio. **7. Investing** There are various ways to build up funds for your child's education. Investing in stocks, bonds, unit trusts and an education endowment policy are some options. What you choose and how much cash you allocate will depend on your risk appetite and time horizon. If you are younger, with a stronger risk appetite and a longer time horizon, you may be better placed to take on more risk in exchange for more returns. You could allocate a significant part of your investments to equities or an equity fund. More conservative investors can consider a greater allocation to bonds, bond funds or an education endowment policy. Financial experts say that a good option would be equity-based funds with a focus on income. This is because the underlying equities of these funds are more stable, and possess better risk-reward characteristics compared to fixed-income products. If the dividend payouts of the fund are reinvested, the power of compounding will accelerate the portfolio returns over time. More sophisticated investors could consider a dual-currency product that allows returns to be converted into the foreign currency required for the tuition fees. **How banks can help you** Parents should start to instil good financial habits in their children by taking advantage of the budgeting tools and calculators available online, says Mr Deepak. **DBS BANK** Go to <https://www.dbs.com.sg/i-bank/nav/index.page> for the likely cost of education. **HSBC BANK** • QuickFX – This is a mobile-based app that enables parents to manage and reduce currency exchange risks on the go for their mid- to long-term foreign currency and remittance needs. This is important if their children are considering an overseas education. • Multi-currency debit card – This will be launched next year and will enable HSBC customers to transact in nine different currencies without being subject to exchange rate margin. The objective is to offer cashless and contactless payments. It will be useful to those planning to study overseas. **OCBC BANK** It offers an education planning calculator on its OCBC Life Goals website that can help parents estimate the cost of tertiary education for their children and if they are doing enough by way of saving and investing to meet the estimated costs.



Banker Dennis Chin, 38, with his wife Shyane Chong, 34, a relationship manager at a bank, and their son David, who turns two this year. The couple started planning for their first-born's tertiary education needs when he was born. By starting earlier, they can set aside smaller amounts for savings. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

Planning early for the family and son's education

Banker Dennis Chin believes in the Chinese saying *xian ku hou tian* – If you sacrifice at the beginning, then you will enjoy later. Mr Chin, 38, told The Sunday Times that he and his wife Shyane Chong, 34, a relationship manager at a bank, started planning for their first-born's tertiary education needs when he was born. Their son David turns two this year. "We agreed that the earlier we start saving, the less we will spend on activities such as going on overseas travels, shopping and watching movies which may provide instant gratification, but means we need to save more later in life,"

says Mr Chin, a vice-president at an international bank. By starting earlier, they can set aside smaller amounts for savings, and be exposed to fewer risks, given that they have correspondingly lower targeted investment returns. The couple have set aside \$450 monthly – with \$50 going into health insurance, \$200 to life insurance and \$200 to an investment plan catering to tertiary education needs. "As our resources are finite, I prioritise my child's basic medical insurance (MediShield and life insurance) before allocating the rest into funding for his tertiary education," says Mr Chin. David is insured for \$250,000 each for early critical illness, critical illness, total and permanent disability and death.

Mr Chin recalls signing up for a life insurance plan when his son turned one month as it was the earliest he could take on a policy. The plan has a limited premium-paying term of 20 years. The couple want the investment-linked plan to reap at least \$100,000, which will form part of David's overseas education costs. "The investment-linked insurance plan invests into mutual funds as they provide the necessary diversification and growth opportunities across different asset classes, and they are professionally managed," notes Mr Chin. "The \$200 monthly commitment will potentially grow to \$88,000 after 21 years at estimated annual returns of 5 per cent," he says. He adds that investing a fixed amount each month allows them

to maintain affordability, stay invested over the longer term and utilise dollar costing to smooth out the market volatility while avoiding behavioural biases. They also have alternative plans, including tapping his wife's Central Provident Fund (CPF) savings. This is because she has not utilised her CPF for housing purposes and is on track to hit the Basic Retirement Sum when she turns 55. By then, David would likely be into his second year of tertiary education, so her CPF savings beyond the retirement sum can be used to fund his education. Separately, the couple have initiated a plan for monthly investment into bonds, equities and exchange-traded funds for the family to be used for any unfore-

seen needs that may arise. Also, they can tap their cash savings or retirement funds to close the education funding gap if required. "Do not over-commit to any one plan," says Mr Chin, "and have sufficient resources set aside to take advantage of opportunities as the financial market is robust and innovative. "New products are constantly being conceived and existing products are evolving. Understand that change is the only constant." Lastly, review your investment and insurance portfolio constantly and seek professional financial advice for alternative viewpoints to supplement your own philosophy, he adds.

Lorna Tan

lornatan@sph.com.sg



Taking corporate investment to the next level: Why UOBAM Invest is breaking new ground

For many, investing through online channels is a trend that has been around for more than two decades, driven by a surge in smartphone usage and mobile connectivity.

In digital investing, the focus has been on meeting the investment needs of individual investors and largely overlooking corporate investors — until now.

UOB Asset Management (UOBAM) has come up with a new digital advisory service that assists corporate investors in their investment decisions and makes surplus company funds work harder for them.

UOBAM Invest, the first digital advisory service for corporate investors in Singapore, is an investment portfolio management platform that provides automated and customised investment advice to corporates.

"We saw that the medium to large corporates market was under-served in investing. Cash flow is key for companies in the short term, as they have salaries, rent and utilities to manage," said Ms Rachel Ong, senior director, business development at UOBAM.

"But there is also a real need for companies to plan long term, whether it is making capital investments such as purchasing a factory, or replenishing resources for the business. They will need to plan and invest to achieve these goals.

"The question is how we can help companies achieve both short- and long-term goals."

The answer, UOBAM found after talking to their corporate clients, was to make investing simple, smart and safe for companies.

To help businesses balance their short-term needs and invest surplus funds for long-term goals, UOBAM Invest equips them with smart investment tools.

The service is a combination of UOBAM's investment expertise and advanced technology to share investment advice, based on each corporate's investment goals and appetite for risk, helping them achieve their goals.

"Leveraging more than 30 years of experience in the industry, we came up with our own proprietary investment framework and methodology that were used to develop UOBAM Invest," said Ms Ong.

UOBAM Invest was designed to address some of the biggest bugbears corporates have with investing — large investment ticket size, cookie-cutter investment options, and a lack of suitable online investment platforms for corporates.

Simple does it

First, UOBAM Invest is fully digital and mobile-friendly. This makes investing convenient and accessible anytime.

It is also flexible — corporate investors can choose to invest based on a guided or independent approach, or both. For instance, a corporate investor who prefers to receive a customised digital investment portfolio can opt for the **Digital Adviser** feature.

A more independent investor can choose to build his own portfolio and buy or sell his fund holdings with **Fund Direct**.

Corporates can opt to sign up for a preview of the features and funds before making the first investment.

The service keeps track of all transactions from Day 1 of investing, providing corporates with a comprehensive overview of their dealings. Through this, they can better analyse their past activities and monitor their portfolios at the same time.

Smart investing

UOBAM Invest taps on decades of award-winning investment expertise and capabilities, using digitised solutions to take corporate investing to the next level.

UOBAM partnered global fintech service provider FNZ Group, which provides multi-channel wealth management services, to develop powerful institutional-grade portfolio optimisation methods to recommend an optimal portfolio to suit each investor's needs and risk appetite.

The customised solutions generated by the portfolio optimisation algorithm are based on UOBAM's proprietary screening methodology and asset allocation framework. The service aims to fully understand a company's investment goals, risk tolerance level and investment horizon before recommending solutions.

This is where UOBAM Invest shines — developing solutions customised to the needs of the clients.

Using the portfolio planner tool, corporate investors can key in their inflows, such as current and future contributions, and outflows such as future expenditure. They can also prioritise each investment goal differently and the service then calculates the viability of the investment plan.

Your journey with UOBAM Invest

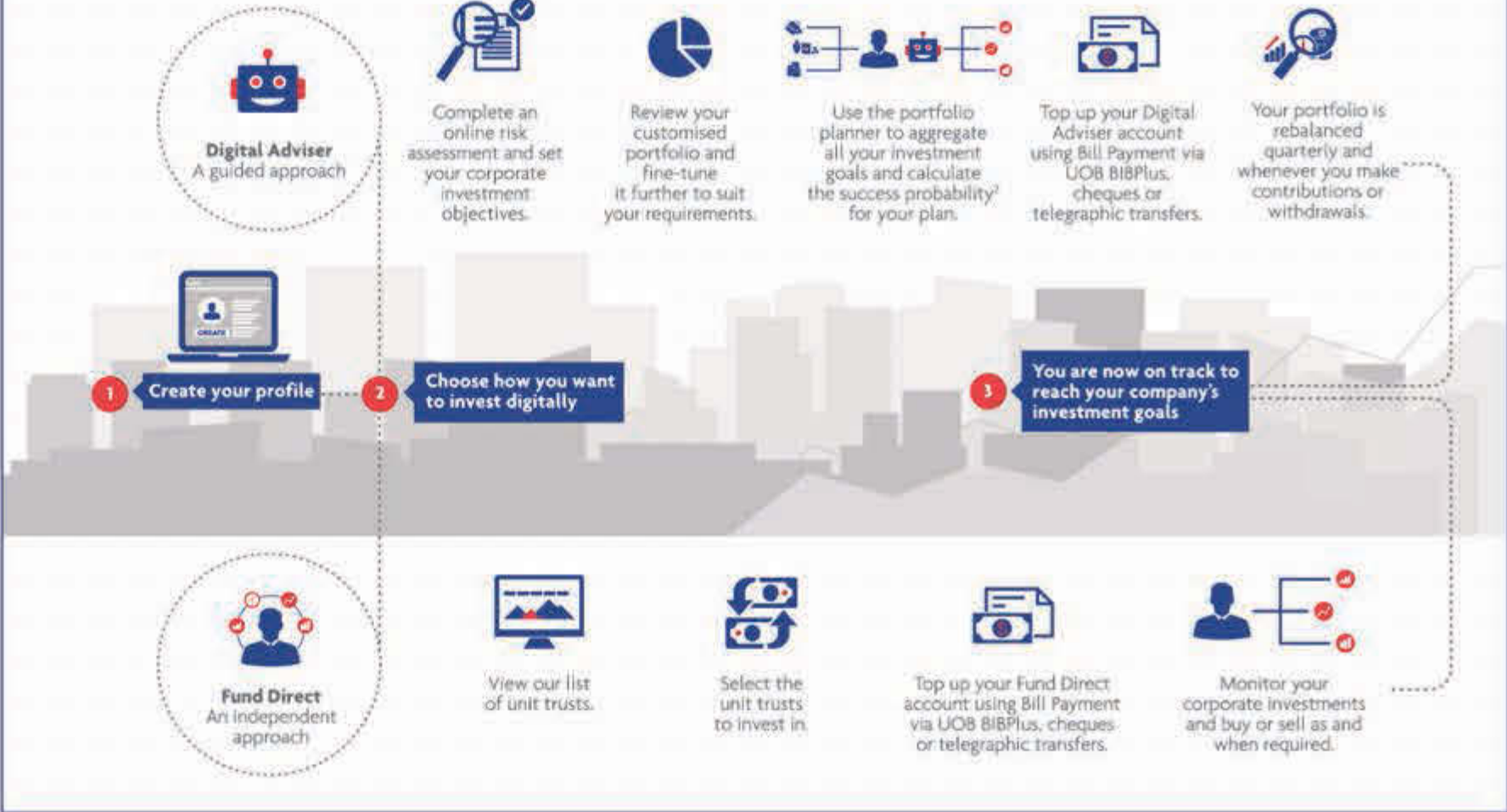


PHOTO AND GRAPHIC: UOBAM

Quick start to UOBAM Invest

Sign up for a preview of UOBAM Invest before making your first investment.

| Fees charged to investors | Digital Adviser | Fund Direct |
|--|---|---|
| Advisory fee | 1% p.a.* | N.A. |
| Platform charge | 0.3% p.a. | 0.3% p.a. |
| Subscription charge | N.A. | 1% Note: Does not apply to the United SGD Money Market Fund. |
| Minimum AUM to sign up | \$500,000 | \$500,000 (SGD account) US\$500,000 (USD account) |
| US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) charge (on sell trades for US-listed ETFs applies) | 0.0013% of the value sold Note: Based on prevailing SEC fee rates and is subject to change from time to time without notice. Please refer to the SEC website for latest updates. | N.A. |
| Fees charged by underlying Funds and ETFs | | |
| Underlying fund related fees (e.g. Management Fee, Trustee Fee, Valuation Fee etc.) payable out of the Funds to the Managers, the Trustee and other parties | Please refer to respective fund prospectus. | |
| * The advisory fee (1% p.a.) is waived for the Digital Adviser feature till 31 March 2019 only. Usual fee inclusive of platform charge is 1.3% p.a. Please refer to the Terms and Conditions governing the UOBAM Invest promotion and eligibility criteria at UOBAM.com.sg/UOBAMInvest . | | |



Rachel Ong,
senior director,
business development at
UOB Asset Management

We have dedicated our efforts to build a dynamic solution that thinks in the best interest of each corporate investor. When we first started, we hoped that through UOBAM Invest, UOBAM would redefine investing for corporates, and be right by our clients to serve their corporate investment needs.

This is unique to UOBAM Invest as it gives greater insight for corporates before they begin investing.

Based on all the information, UOBAM Invest will create a forecast — investors can plan for a timeframe of up to 30 years — and calculate the plan's success probability*.

The probability is statistically calculated using the results derived from the optimisation algorithm which factors in the investor's input on their investment goals, investment horizon and UOBAM's current forecast of events and performance of each asset class.

Almost every solution that the system generates will be customised according to the corporate's investment risk and investment profile, with thousands of plausible portfolio results based on various economic and market scenarios. Simply put, it's like having a personal investment adviser at hand, round the clock.

The customised investment proposal is based on a combination of award-winning UOBAM-managed funds and global exchange traded funds.

The investor can also choose to fine-tune the proposed portfolio at any time — such as when he wants to take on a higher risk portfolio to meet his targets earlier, or withdraw some investment funds to meet an urgent payment. To ensure an optimal allocation, UOBAM Invest will alert the investor should it calculate a mismatch between his actions and the level of risk he is willing to take.

After confirming the desired settings for the investment portfolio, corporate investors can simply let UOBAM Invest monitor the investments and rebalance the portfolio quarterly, and whenever funds are injected or withdrawn.

Safety is priority

For corporate clients, the security of their funds is a key concern. Besides the use of two-factor authentication (2FA), an industry standard for secure transactions, UOBAM Invest has additional security features. For instance, companies can decide on account permission rights and add or authorise different types of users to view, execute or approve investment decisions.

Corporate funds are also transacted only via bank payment modes such as cheques, telegraphic transfers and UOB Business Internet Banking Plus (UOB BiBPlus). This ensures that all funds go through secure channels during transactions.

The funds are also placed in custodian accounts with United Overseas Bank Limited, a leading bank in South-east Asia, and of which UOBAM is a subsidiary.

Simple, smart and safe — UOBAM Invest is all about making sense of money for corporate investors.

Experience UOBAM Invest at
UOBAM.com.sg/UOBAMInvest

Notes:

1. Please refer to UOBAM.com.sg for the full list of awards.

2. The success probability is statistically calculated and it is not a guarantee of the principal sum invested or of any rate of return. The portfolio may lose money. UOBAM does not make any prediction, promise or guarantee of any kind. Market prices may go up and down and past performance is not an indicator of any future or likely performance or outcome. UOBAM may update the success probability and any portfolio projection from time to time if there is a change in its market expectations or assumptions.

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UOBAM Asset Management Ltd. Company Reg. No. 198600120Z

SmallChange

Make loyalty schemes fuss-free at malls

Score points with customers by tapping technology to make their experience a breezy one



Loh Keng Fatt

It is showtime for my wife and me after we recently paid \$45 for 10 tickets to watch weekday movies in a Cathay cineplex before 5pm on weekdays. Each ticket comes with a hot drink too.

But I had hesitated for a bit before stumping up cash for the deal.

I am loath to tie myself up to packages, not really knowing if I really need multiple, repeated use of a service or item, and uncomfortable that I am “forced” to give patronage only because I had paid up front.

Which explains why I had only two loyalty cards over many years, with one linked to petrol station Esso, since I drive, and the other to FairPrice supermarkets.

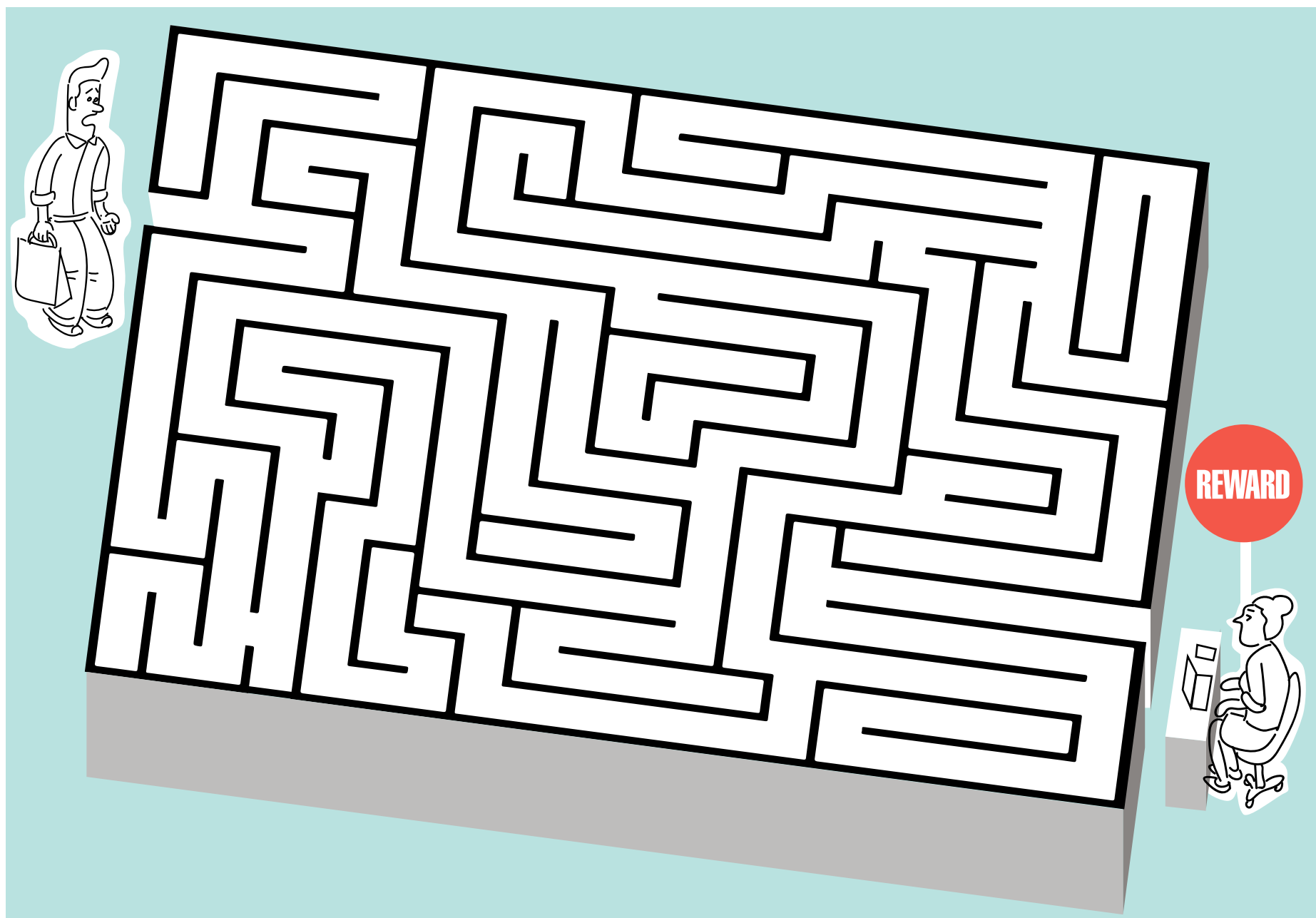
I routinely say no to promoters who try to sell me a package or card that is connected to a hotel group, restaurant chain or fitness network. I decline sign-up forms from cashiers at many shops who try to pitch the hefty savings I can get if I join their loyalty or incentive scheme.

While there are savings, I acknowledge, I think it does not make sense to keep going back to the same place, especially with so many other options available.

Once you have accumulated a substantial number of points, you also feel pressured to spend more only because you can see the finishing line of being able to redeem the points for a freebie.

In a sense, you can become a prisoner of that particular business.

Still, such thinking has not stopped more companies from promoting such deals heavily. Never mind if many other people may also steer clear of them,



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

Just like investing early in life is recommended to build up a nest egg, tapping such loyalty schemes early in life also helps stretch your hard-earned dollar, especially when you are at the start of your working career. That is why I have told my sons to sign up for this mall scheme that I am on now. They were not even aware that there was such a programme, despite being frequent visitors.

frightened off by horror stories of companies that went bust or even by the simple inconvenient fact that they have to keep track of the points earned, before the points expire after a certain time.

That is why the euphoria of, say, getting a 25 per cent discount for the next meal soon gives way to the realisation that there may be a short two- or three-month window to take advantage of it.

But despite such misgivings, I did recently sign up for a loyalty scheme at a shopping mall in eastern Singapore. I was hooked because I could patronise any outlet, with the amount spent in total just needing to be above \$50 a day to earn points.

I soon found out that the mall does not make it easy to accumulate points.

First, you have to sign up for the scheme in person, and I normally give short shrift to such an administrative chore.

Then, you have to queue up to show your invoices to a staff member before the points are updated in your account, or

exchanged for one-off promotional carrots like Grab vouchers.

On weekends, the line can be forbiddingly long.

Though I can scan receipts and upload them via an app, that again takes time, and this practice also discriminates against those who do not want to download yet another app on their mobile phone.

Worse, some malls insist that you report your purchases within the same day, another example of treating customers without too much respect.

In this age of technology, can a system not be designed where I just key in the transaction number on the receipt?

Or, better still, can't the system link the credit card I use to my account and just award the points, without any intervention from me? Still, I do buy the point that every dollar you spend should work harder for you.

Just like investing early in life is recommended to build up a nest egg, tapping such loyalty schemes early in life also helps stretch your hard-earned dollar, especially

when you are at the start of your working career.

That is why I have told my sons to sign up for this mall scheme that I am on now. They were not even aware that there was such a programme, despite being frequent visitors.

Malls on their part must make it a breeze for consumers. In Singapore, where there are so many malls, any that can make the experience of earning points a no-sweat affair stands to have an advantage.

But the operator must be willing to tap the new technologies and implement a system, which should pay off in the long run.

This is a niche that new malls, starting from the drawing board, can tap.

Now I await eagerly what the folk at Paya Lebar Quarter, for example, can do when the mall opens soon.

With big boys Lendlease and Abu Dhabi Investment Authority as co-investors, surely they would have the financial muscle to come up with a fuss-free loyalty scheme?

kengfatt@sph.com.sg

Education matters, survey shows

Lorna Tan
Invest Editor

It's all hands to the pump when it comes to education matters, with parents taking on extra work, sacrificing holidays and taking loans to pay the bills while the students themselves may do part-time work to help meet costs.

The findings are from an HSBC survey conducted last year that looked at attitudes and behaviour towards education among more than 10,500 parents and children globally, including 501 parents and 100 students here.

One key finding was that 54 per cent of parents in Singapore have taken fewer holidays and 51 per cent have stopped or reduced leisure activities to support their child's education. It also noted that 31 per cent take on extra hours at work or take on a second job.

Most parents try to stay within their means, with 81 per cent contributing towards their child's tertiary education from day-to-day income, as opposed to using their savings, or turning to loans.

Only 13 per cent are funding from a specific education savings or investment account.

FUNDING GAP

Parents here contribute on average of \$36,417 towards their child's ter-

tiary education – almost double the global average and behind only Hong Kong and United Arab Emirates. However, there is a funding gap as Singapore students spend an average of \$46,425 over the course of a degree, which is \$10,008 above what their parents are contributing. These expenses include tuition fees, accommodation, day-to-day bills and lifestyle costs.

Many university students rely on extra-curricular jobs to cover costs. About 74 per cent are in paid employment. And 53 per cent say it is out of financial necessity.

Not all work for extra cash. About 30 per cent of students take jobs to gain experience and 43 per cent undertake some form of unpaid voluntary work.

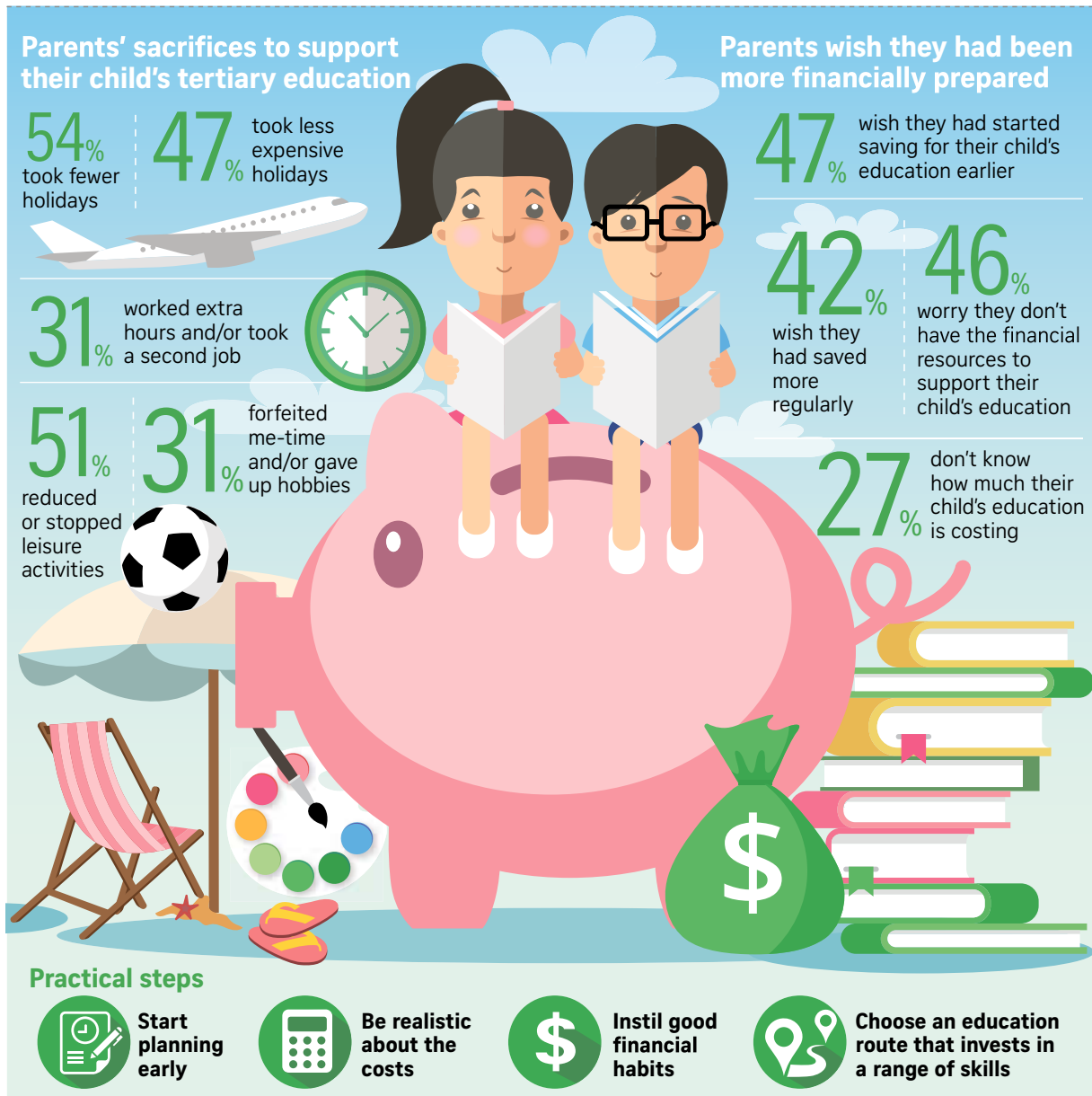
About 47 per cent of Singapore parents wished they had started saving earlier for their children's education while 46 per cent worry that they do not have the financial resources to support them.

SINGAPOREANS MORE LIKELY THAN GLOBAL PEERS TO STUDY ABROAD

Singaporeans have the highest proportion (on a per capita basis) of tertiary graduates in the world. Six out of 10 between 25 and 29 years old completed tertiary education.

A 2007 study found that 11 per cent of Singaporeans study abroad compared with 2 per cent globally.

Singapore survey findings – at a glance



Source: HSBC BANK SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS: JASTER NGUI

Most parents try to stay within their means with 81 per cent contributing towards their child's tertiary education from day-to-day income, as opposed to using their savings or turning to loans.

HSBC BEEFS UP PRODUCT SUITE TO ADDRESS EDUCATION NEEDS OF SINGAPOREANS

Mr Anurag Mathur, head of retail banking and wealth management at HSBC Bank here, noted that Singaporeans are among the highest financial contributors for children's tertiary education in the world. This is because they place a premium on their children receiving a university education and are prepared to pay for it.

He added that HSBC has been building its capabilities to help Singapore parents and students fund their future. "As more Singaporeans look beyond our shores for education, career or business opportunities, it is critical they partner with a bank that can support them locally as well as overseas," he says.

For instance, the bank supports parents across their children's entire education life-cycle. This includes savings plans, access to overseas banking and relationship managers across 66 markets or territories, and the ability to transfer money to children's domestic and overseas accounts in real-time.

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Fund manager interview series

Driven to succeed with a focus on AI

Stephen Jue, director at Allianz Global Investors and co-portfolio manager of Allianz Global Artificial Intelligence Fund, discusses his outlook on opportunities in our series featuring fund managers and market experts.



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Stephen Jue rejoined Allianz Global Investors (AllianzGI) after having worked with the firm from 2005 to 2014. He is a member of the United States technology team and focuses on hardware, networking and software companies.

He has 17 years of investment-industry experience and helps the team manage several technology-specific portfolios.

Mr Jue has worked at Rainier Investment Management and RBC Capital Markets. Before that, he had various marketing, finance and accounting roles with a division of Gillette. He was also a Chartered Professional Accountant with KPMG.

He has a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from Northeastern University and a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

Q Tell us about Allianz Global Artificial Intelligence Fund. What is its investment strategy and what are the main reasons that contributed to the fund's success?

A At AllianzGI, we believe artificial intelligence (AI) is likely to be the largest driver of innovation and disruption across every industry group for decades to come. The accelerating pace of innovation in AI means companies will need to identify and deploy new business strategies infused with AI or find themselves at a competitive disadvantage.

The Allianz Global Artificial Intelligence Fund is a focused strategy based on bottom-up, fundamental research investing in companies benefiting from the adoption of AI infrastructure, applications and AI-enabled industries.

We believe AI could have a bigger and more profound impact on people's lives and society than even the Internet. For investors, this inflection point represents an exciting opportunity to access future sources of innovation and growth potential across the market.

The Allianz Global Artificial Intelligence Fund invests across all sectors and around the globe for innovative companies developing or leveraging AI technology and is not managed to a typical technology index. The market for AI is at an earlier stage of development and the portfolio usually has above-80 per cent active share versus most global tech and other thematic funds.

Q What are your key considerations when evaluating a stock? How do you ensure that you're picking winners most of the time in the light of market uncertainty?

A The goal of the Allianz Global Artificial Intelligence Fund is to navigate the changes ushered in by this transformative technology and invest in companies which are best positioned to deliver shareholder value creation.

The fund invests globally in public firms across all sectors that stand to potentially benefit the most from the deployment of AI infrastructure and enabling technologies that are critical to the growth of AI; development of AI applications and software to make smarter insights and decisions; and the adoption of AI in key business processes



Mr Stephen Jue, director at Allianz Global Investors, says artificial intelligence could have a bigger, more profound impact on people's lives and society than the Internet. For investors, this inflection point represents an exciting opportunity to access future sources of innovation and growth potential. ST PHOTO: KHALID BABA

to drive AI-enabled industries.

Our analysts conduct over 1,000 meetings with company management teams each year. This face-to-face interaction provides an invaluable source of information on the key differences between competing companies.

For each company, we focus on AI's impact on future growth, profitability and competitive advantages, and model out various scenarios to uncover what the true earnings potential of a business may be in a few years. With deeper understanding of a given company's fundamental outlook, we are in a better position to assess the value of a stock as AI adoption proliferates over the coming years.

AI is already having impact across industries beyond technology. Many of our portfolio holdings in the automotive, consumer, health care, and finance sectors are seeing the early benefits from AI, which is allowing them to introduce unique products and services, potentially enabling them to outperform their industry peers.

Q Tech stocks have been quite volatile recently. What is AllianzGI's view on this? How do valuations compare to other industries?

A While some investors have concerns about the strength of the US market in recent years, the out-performance, especially in the tech sector, has been mainly driven by strong sales and earnings growth due to disruption and new innovations.

We think technology sector valuations are still attractive relative to its growth as the majority of tech companies have been exceeding estimates and the pace of innovation due to cloud and AI is accelerating, and providing attractive growth opportunities.

Compared to the dot-com bubble back in 1998-2000, the majority of tech companies are now producing

tangible earnings and cash flows, and tech valuations are far more reasonable compared to then. The price to earnings (P/E) ratios back in the bubble were in the 50-70x range versus 17-20x today.

P/E multiples haven't expanded much in recent years; it's been strong revenue and earnings growth driving stocks higher. While valuations look expensive for some high-growth tech stocks, the majority of these companies are highly disruptive, attacking new markets, and heavily investing for future growth.

We do not view the volatility in tech stocks as a signal of an impending big correction, but a combination of profit-taking after a decent run, some rotation into defensive sectors, and rising tail risks related to a US-China trade dispute. Technology stocks typically have higher volatility, but also have generated higher returns over the last one, five, 10, and 20 years (as of end October 2018).

If you look back over the last 10 years, the average drawdown in the technology sector has been about minus 11 per cent, but recovered relatively quickly due to the continuous innovation in the sector, healthy fundamentals and strong earnings growth.

As bottoms-up and fundamental investors, we focus on the company's execution of their business strategy and corresponding earnings growth. The companies held in the portfolio are performing as we expect with solid financial results and growth outlook, and we feel confident that their share price will follow the earnings over time.

Q Where are we now in the adoption and development of AI and where do you see the bright spot?

A We are still at the beginning phases of a global transformation that will be ushered in by developments in artificial intelligence. AI is

just starting to equal human narrow intelligence for specialised areas and could reach general intelligence (that is, as smart as humans) in the next 10 to 15 years. The opportunity for shareholder value creation for AI-related companies remains substantial and is growing.

At the same time, we believe that stock-picking will be imperative to capturing the benefits of the opportunity. We are excited about what the coming years will bring and to see how AI technologies can be leveraged to improve people's lives and transform world economies.

Q What's the next big development you would expect in AI?

A In AI Infrastructure, the last few years have been driven by the early adoption of new computing architectures to train deep neural networks for machine-learning. Training involves the development of an advanced algorithm to understand a large data set, whereas inference is when a machine infers things about new data it sees and learns from it.

The next big phase will be about AI inference and the new types of processing and storage needs to deploy AI from the data centre to billions of edge devices. We estimate this next phase to be an opportunity three to five times the size of the training market, and expect to see a number of new product innovations and companies come to market over the next several years.

Q What are the key risks to look out for? How are you managing them, and how can investors reduce their exposure to these?

A The key risks are macroeconomic, geopolitical risks and government regulation. The world economy is more connected today than it has ever been. We believe it means that AI and innovative technologies are the critical areas that will drive the future wealth of na-

tions and may be the real issue in the trade discussions.

We don't believe volatility caused by the trade rhetoric will change the long-term opportunity presented by artificial intelligence. However, we expect there could be several months of volatility related to these issues until a trade deal is signed.

If anything slows AI adoption in the longer term, it would be regulations. We've been pleasantly surprised that governments have talked about AI openly and are putting in place policies to test it, like autonomous driving. They realise it will impact parts of the labour force and understand there will be societal impact, and will need to focus on job retraining. Everyone understands that while you can slow down the technology, it's coming.

Q What keeps you up at night?

A The volatility in the equity markets due to geopolitical uncertainties and daily swings from large systematic and quantitative strategies. In times of elevated volatility, our risk management process and staying active is critical.

This provides us with more opportunities to take advantage of pullbacks in higher-conviction ideas and construct a portfolio with compelling risk-return potential as the market recovers.

Q If I am not a portfolio manager, I would be...?

A A chief financial officer at a promising AI start-up, as I have always been very passionate about information technology.

Although I dream of being the next host of Parts Unknown and do my best to honour the late Anthony Bourdain, whose passion for food, culture and exploration was an inspiration.

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Some tips

Here are investment tips for investors in 2019:

- Be active and selective when investing as the global economy becomes less synchronised.
- Artificial intelligence, big data and the Internet of Things will continue to be strong long-term investment themes.
- Investors may need to be prepared to ride out periods of volatility.
- Stock picking will be imperative to capture the benefits of the dynamic technology industry that is going through a period of great innovation and rapid change.
- Stay invested. Technology stocks can be volatile at times, but longer-term earnings and compounded returns have eventually rewarded investors.

Lorna Tan

Invest



Mr Kelvin Neo in the living room of his 1,400 sq ft three-bedroom unit at the Corals at Keppel Bay condominium, which he bought in October 2017. For Mr Neo, the most important factor when selecting the property was accessibility, such as close proximity to the MRT station, shopping centre and his son's school. ST PHOTOS: SYAZA NISRINA

Me&MyProperty

Leap of faith pays off for property agent

Making the switch from construction to real estate helps him reach financial goals



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Property agent Kelvin Neo took a leap of faith eight years ago when he joined the real estate industry but he knew in his heart that he needed a change.

He had spent 15 years of his life in the construction industry, which he joined as a 20-year-old with his O-level qualifications after national service. Mr Neo rose from a sales executive position to business development manager, and subsequently worked as an associate director, dealing mainly with building materials.

"After being in the construction industry for about 15 years, my wife and I were still unable to reach our financial goals, and work became a dreaded daily routine. After paying the bills, we could hardly have any savings for ourselves, so I decided it was time for a change," he recalls.

Mr Neo, 43, is now a senior division director at ERA, which he joined with the encouragement of a childhood friend.

He liked that ERA is a well-recognised brand and it markets many of Singapore's projects. He still believes that the sky is the limit, especially in the property industry.

Since joining ERA, he has bought and sold several properties, making capital gains along the way.

Ask him for his money attitude and he says: "Be content with what you have, and just be yourself. Don't be blinded by the promises of riches, or the glamorous lifestyles of multi-millionaires."

"To me, it's always important to work hard, and be content with being able to provide a comfortable lifestyle for your loved ones."

Mr Neo's wife, also 43, is an executive assistant to the managing director of the Asia Pacific region for an American global executive search and leadership consulting firm. The couple have a 15-year old son.

Q Describe your home.

A I bought a 1,400 sq ft three-bedroom unit at Corals at Keppel Bay condominium in October 2017 for \$2.85 million. It has a great location with close proximity to the MRT as

well as many amenities such as shopping malls, supermarkets, school, foodcourts and more.

As I have a son, having a good school with all the amenities in the neighbourhood is a great bonus.

I love every part of the home. The balcony of the master bedroom is facing Keppel Marina and the living room is facing Mount Faber.

As the unit I bought was actually a showflat, the interior is lavishly furnished and I was really impressed when I first saw it. I believe most people may not go for this as an investment but I would like to prove to my clients that showflats can also be a good buy. I always believe that investing in value and quality, you will save yourself a lot of stress and hassle. The price of my house has increased by 10 per cent.

Q What's in your property portfolio?

A In 2008, I sold my first home, an HDB flat, for \$380,000, and bought a two-bedroom condo (Botannia in West Coast Park) for \$646,000.

But it was only in May 2010, after I left my 15-year stint in the construction industry to join ERA, that my life was fully transformed.

At ERA, they have a wonderful culture of sharing and the leaders are very hands-on when guiding new associates like me to succeed. During this period, I gained key insights into the real market industry from my leaders and realised that property investment can be a low-risk strategy



Mr Neo bought his three-bedroom unit at the Corals at Keppel Bay (above) condominium for \$2.85 million in 2017.



Mr Neo on the balcony of his home at Corals at Keppel Bay. He says that when it comes to investing in property, holding power is important.

to create more abundance in life. I was taught the ropes of property investment and from the keen guidance of my leaders in ERA, I managed to help many customers secure valuable dream homes. My network grew quickly and I managed to become the top 102nd achiever earning more than \$250,000 in sales commission within 12 months of joining ERA.

Thanks to ERA, with their tried-and-tested property investment strategy, I realised that property investment can be a low-risk game and I began to invest my hard-earned

money into properties myself.

In 2011, I sold my two-bedroom unit at Botannia for \$908,000 and upgraded to a three-bedroom unit for \$1.31 million in the same condominium, which was later sold at \$1.58 million in 2017.

In 2012, I started investing in a one-bedroom condo (Palm Isles near Upper Changi Road North) for \$460,000, and it was sold in 2016 for \$580,000. I also invested in a three-bedroom condo in 2012 (Parc Olympia, in the same area) for \$805,000, which was sold in 2016 at \$920,000.

Besides working hard to maintain my top achievements (I have consistently been among the top 50th-150th achievers each year since I joined ERA), I also created passive income through rental before I resold the properties. Most of the properties were sold after a few years of rental with a minimum gain of 15 per cent.

Q Describe your property investing strategy.

A I was attracted to my current home because it offers a quality lifestyle and comfort. I believe that one doesn't have to choose only cheap buys as an investment as long as you can afford it.

The most important factor for me is accessibility, such as close proximity to the MRT, shopping centre and my son's school. Secondly, the surrounding environment matters, the neighbours that you see every day, as well as the surrounding views which affect your experience as a resident too.

If you're planning to buy property, holding power is important. If you are able to hold for your property for the long term, especially Singapore property, you will definitely achieve a profit.

Many people are concerned and would want to avoid the Additional Buyer's Stamp Duty, but there's no need to go out of your way to avoid it, as this is not something that we can change. As property agents, it is our job to identify good investment opportunities for our clients, and to help them make good investment decisions.

Q What's your view of the property market?

A I'm very positive about the Singapore property market, but as mentioned, holding power is very important.

Q What's your financing strategy?

A I would usually go for the minimum loan of about 40 per cent to 50 per cent, as I don't think it's a good idea to overstretch yourself with a 75 per cent or maximum loan, if possible. Note that during an economic crisis, many banks will come to you for loan interest revision, and that will end up costing you a lot more.

Q Do you have insurance cover for property and contents?

A Yes, the insurance coverage is about \$1.6 million. The insurance covers (various things) from property mortgage to life insurance.

Q What's your overall investing strategy?

A I invest in insurance savings plans and pay a monthly premium of \$1,000. On top of that, I invest in medical coverage for myself and my family. My insurance policies include AIA Platinum Term (\$1.6 million) for death and total permanent disability coverage, AIA Prime Life for death and early critical illness, AIA Healthshield Gold Max A with Essential A for hospital expenses, AIA Solitaire Personal Accident for death benefits and medical reimbursements, as well as a 20-year PruWealth investment plan.

I'm a strong believer that investing in yourself and your family is the best investment.

Q My dream home is...

A My current house is a dream come true. Many people say that for the same price, I can purchase a landed property but that isn't a priority for me. The location of this home is fantastic, I love the interior design, the gorgeous view, and the comfortable lifestyle, so my current place is most definitely my dream home.

The location of the home is a winner for me – even though it's a 99-year lease instead of a freehold property, I still think it's great as an investment property due to the stellar location.

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What'sNewInProperty

Tapering in industrial govt land sales boon for industrial market

Christine Li

Demand for industrial space moderated last year due to uncertainties in the global outlook, with stock markets plunging amid the brewing United States-China trade war.

Net demand measured by absorption of multiple-user factory space for first nine months of the year was just 1.2 million square feet (sq ft), a significant decrease from the 2017 full-year absorption of 3.9 million sq ft.

Similarly, warehouse net absorp-

tion over the same period fell to 2.9 million sq ft compared with the 8.6 million sq ft absorption in 2017.

Demand for industrial sites through government land sales has also been muted. Out of four confirmed list sites for the second half of 2018 that have been tendered, two were not awarded because the bids were deemed too low.

There is also a lack of participation as none of the four tenders received more than four bids. This is to be expected as industrial rents stagnated last year due to the supply overhang from preceding years.

Under the Industrial Government Land Sales Programme for the first half of 2019, the government released five confirmed list and seven reserve list sites.

Despite the number of confirmed list sites falling from six to five, the total gross floor area (GFA) offered rose slightly from 824,000 sq ft in the second half of 2018 to 894,000 sq ft in the first six months of this year.

This was due to the addition of the Senoko Drive site, the largest on the confirmed list at 323,000 sq ft. This plot is being sold with a lease

tenure of 30 years, in contrast to the other confirmed list sites, which have 20-year tenures.

The release of the Senoko Drive site, along with the Woodlands Industrial Park E2/E5 plot, is to support the government's initiative to turn Woodlands into a regional commercial and industrial hub.

While the number of reserve list sites remained the same at seven, the total GFA offered shrunk from 2.1 million sq ft in the second half of last year to 1.8 million sq ft in the first six months of 2019.

The stable confirmed list supply

will lend support to the industrial market in the short to medium term. In addition, a recent government study found that the value added from US-China bilateral exports only comprised 1.29 per cent of Singapore's GDP in 2017.

Singapore might even experience some benefit as some companies are contemplating moving a portion of their manufacturing base out of China to South-East Asia.

While low-cost production lines are expected to move to destinations such as Vietnam and Thailand, high-tech manufacturing ac-

tivity could conceivably make its way to Singapore due to the requirement for a skilled workforce.

This would boost demand for high-tech and business park spaces in the coming year. Factory rents could see an increase of 0.5 per cent, while warehouse rents may rise 1 per cent as demand has picked up due to rising competition in the e-commerce space.

• The writer is the senior director and head of Singapore research at property consultancy firm Cushman & Wakefield.

Life

C TELAVIV
Suzanne Sng dishes on
the latest dining hotspot
C10&11



You can learn new
things at any time in
your life if you're willing
to be a beginner.

– Barbara Sher

Live more.
Bank less.

CLEAN START TO THE YEAR

Out with the old,
in with the new,
with the help of
lemon juice, vinegar
and a dash of salt.
Tan Hsueh Yun and
Benson Ang roll up
their sleeves and
find out how to
clean everything



Ms Low Chee Mung (left) is executive housekeeper of The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore and Ms Eileen Chia is executive housekeeper of Park Hotel Alexandra. ST PHOTOS: KUA CHEE SIONG, TIMOTHY DAVID

Can keeping your home clean change your life and bring joy? Japanese decluttering expert Marie Kondo has made bank preaching that philosophy. Her name has even become a verb – “I’m going to Marie Kondo my apartment this weekend.” Her belief that people should keep only possessions that “spark joy” has spawned countless memes. Since 2014, when the English translation was published, her book, *The Life-changing Magic Of Tidying Up*, has sold millions of copies and sparked fan clubs all over the world. Solid buzz is building for her recently launched Netflix series, *Tidying Up With Marie Kondo*, where she helps hoarders, students and families with kids, among others, get their homes – and lives – in order. The recent spate of food poisoning cases in Singapore, involving caterers, restaurants and a luxe hotel, has made hygiene a top priority. Now, with the new year in full swing and Chinese New Year coming up, is 2019 the year to start

afresh and make sure every possession is ultra clean? If yes, how does a person go about doing it? For the home, The Sunday Times turned to a special group of people who understand the magic of cleaning up: hotel housekeepers. Those interviewed, from Andaz Singapore, Goodwood Park Hotel, Orchard Hotel, Park Hotel Alexandra and The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore, exude the sort of equanimity only people who glide about in dirt-free workplaces and homes will ever achieve. Their eyes gleam when they talk about cleaning. They know multiple ways to clean everything, eschew the use of harsh chemicals even though they have access to an array of them and advocate the softly-softly approach over brute-force scrubbing. And they all agree on one thing: Clean regularly and there will never be a need for a massive spring-clean. Mr Luke Lee, 47, director of housekeeping at the 233-room Goodwood Park Hotel, says: “I don’t have to rush when Chinese

New Year is here. I have never spring-cleaned in my life.” Married without children, he takes charge of the cleaning at home. Mr Lee, who oversees a team of 41 at work, has weekly, fortnightly, monthly and quarterly chores all worked out for his home. Ms Eileen Chia, 50, executive housekeeper of the 442-room Park Hotel Alexandra and who oversees a team of 32, adds: “Just like with our daily work, we can’t procrastinate or there’d be a backlog. The same applies to cleaning.” The cleaning agents they use at work and for their homes are not the industrial-strength chemicals people might associate with professional cleaning. Instead, these agents keep coming up in interviews: water, lemon juice, distilled white vinegar, baking soda and salt. Stronger products would include multi-purpose cleaners, toilet cleaners and stain and mould sprays, all available in supermarkets. Ms Low Chee Mung, 50, executive housekeeper of the 608-room

Ritz-Carlton and who oversees a team of 110, says lemon and salt together can work wonders. She uses the combination to sanitise chopping boards and the light abrasive action of the salt removes dirt. It can also be used to clean bird droppings from windows, while lemons can be used to remove limescale from electric kettles. Ms Patricia Tan, 50, director of housekeeping and who oversees a team of 60 to 70 at the 656-room Orchard Hotel, says: “People think stronger chemicals work better.” That, she adds, is not necessarily true. “If you have a tough stain, don’t give up. It takes a lot of patience. Allow the cleaning agent to do its work.” She says that if surfaces are not cleaned regularly, layers of dirt can build up. When cleaning agents are applied, they break the surface dirt into smaller parts, making that top layer easier to remove. But the cleaning agents would not have penetrated deeper into the lower layers of dirt, so repeat treatments will be neces-

sary to remove the entire stain. Beyond cleaning, she adds, it is important to air out rooms in the home, opening the windows to let in sunlight and air. This helps to remove odours. “It also cheers you up,” she says. “If you usually have the air-conditioning on while at home, then when you are not at home and, if it’s safe to do so, leave the windows open. Greenery in the home also helps to purify the air and the leaves cool the air too.” She suggests finding plants that will grow indoors and in air-conditioning, such as Mother-In-Law’s Tongue, Peace Lily and Aglaonema Silver Queen. She has been in the industry for 28 years and is so serious about her job that she wears spectacles without prescription to prevent dust and fumes from irritating her eyes. No matter how diligent the cleaning, all the effort comes to naught if people will not stop accumulating things. Ms Chia from Park Hotel Alexandra says: “Buy only what you need. If we keep buying things like pots, pans, plates and cutlery, they accumulate. How will we maintain them?” Ms Tan practises what she preaches. “Think three times before buying anything, say, a dress,” she says. “Is there an occasion where I can wear this? Where will I wear this? When will I wear this? ‘I like’ and ‘I need’ are totally different.”

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MORE STORIES on C2 to C5

Clean Start To The Year

Clean it right at home

Head housekeepers of five hotels share their tips on the spots people forget to clean



Tan Hsueh Yun

Most people know to dust their furniture, vacuum and mop their floors, and clean toilets and kitchen fixtures.

But what areas do they often overlook and should really pay more attention to? Here is a list from the head housekeepers of five hotels.

LIVING ROOM

- **Behind cabinets and cupboards:** Move the furniture pieces out and clean the backs as well as the skirting and flooring behind the furniture periodically.
- **Carved wooden furniture:** Clean the nooks and crannies monthly.
- **Sofa and armchairs:** Remove the seats and back cushions and vacuum weekly. Clean the covers every six months.
- **Chair and table legs:** Wipe clean with a damp cloth weekly and more often if there are kids at home.
- **Rugs and carpets:** Vacuum once a week and have them professionally cleaned quarterly.
- **Ceilings:** Wipe clean ceilings and the tops of windows, curtains and air-conditioners.
- **Ceiling fans and spotlights:** Wipe clean every fortnight.
- **Stair railings:** Wipe with a damp cloth weekly.
- **Vacuum cleaner:** Take out the vacuum bag and wipe the inside of the chamber that holds the bag, as it gets dusty. This ensures the vacuum cleaner motor does not become clogged with dirt.
- **Window blinds:** Vacuum or wipe clean every two to three months.



Keep your living room spick and span by vacuuming rugs, seats and cushions once a week. PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

BEDROOM

- **Air-conditioner:** Wipe the outside weekly, clean the filter every month and service the air-conditioner every three to six months.
- **Bed:** Rotate the mattress 180 degrees three months after use. Three months later, flip the mattress over. Alternate between these two actions every three months.
- **Bed linen:** Change weekly and, for kids and babies' beds, every two to three days.
- **Mattress:** Vacuum in between the mattress and mattress piping, top and bottom, monthly.
- **Under the bed:** Vacuum and mop weekly, especially if it is a kids' room, to make sure no dust, food or toys lurk underneath. Push the bed off the wall, clean the back of the bed and vacuum and mop the floor behind the bed every three months.
- **Curtains:** Take them down and launder every six months. Steam cleaning is not enough.
- **Drawers:** Take out the contents, remove hair and dust, and wipe clean every two to three days.
- **Lampshades:** Wipe with a damp cloth every month.

BATHROOM

- **Back and outside of toilet bowls:** Most people focus on the toilet bowl, but dirt can get trapped behind and down the sides of the toilet bowl. These should be wiped clean weekly.
- **Toilet bowl:** Clean under the rim. Wear gloves just for cleaning the toilet and using a less abrasive scouring pad – the kind coloured white or light brown – scrub with toilet cleaner as not all toilet brushes are properly angled to reach that part of the bowl. Use a dental mirror to check that all is clean.
- **Bathroom fixtures:** Use a damp magic sponge to wipe faucets and shower taps.
- **Bathroom pipes:** Wipe clean weekly with a damp cloth.
- **Floor traps:** Lift the floor trap and scrub, with a toothbrush if necessary. To prevent smells, pour baking soda and vinegar down the drains weekly.
- **GROUT:** Using a solution made with 15g soap powder, 15ml bleach and 500ml water, scrub the grout weekly with a toothbrush. Or spray a solution made with one-part vinegar and one-part baking soda on the grout and leave it for a few minutes before cleaning.
- **Limescale on shower heads:** Gently brush it off with a soft brush every month.
- **Mirrors and glass shower screens:** Use a cleaning agent made for car windows, because it repels water, and a squeegee to get these to shine. Or use a vinegar and water solution and a microfibre cloth, which is lint-free and does not leave watermarks.
- **Silicone seals:** Spray stain and mould cleaner on these and allow the cleaner to penetrate for about 15 to 20 minutes before washing. Leave the bathroom while the spray is doing its work, so you do not get dizzy from the fumes.

KITCHEN

- **Cabinet doors:** Wipe with a damp cloth once a week.
- **Refrigerator:** The ventilation in an overstuffed fridge may not be optimal. Clean the fridge weekly by taking out everything. Wipe the shelves, clean up spills and remove debris in vegetable bins.
- **Kitchen drawers:** Remove the entire drawer and clean thoroughly every six months to make sure it is free of dirt and insects.
- **Door handles:** Wipe fridge door and cabinet handles with anti-bacterial wipes twice a week.
- **Cooker hood filters:** Remove the metal filters, soak overnight in hot water and dishwashing detergent, rinse, wipe dry and re-install every six months, but more often if there is a lot of heavy cooking.
- **Stainless-steel kitchen sinks and hobs:** To make them shine, put a few drops of olive oil on a soft cloth and use that to buff the surface gently.
- **Electric kettle:** Place half a lemon in the kettle, fill with water and boil every month. Any

limescale should be gone.

Let the water cool and pour it out and remove the lemon before using the kettle again.

- **Chopping boards:** Mix salt with lemon juice and use the coarse mixture to scrub chopping boards, preferably daily after using. Rinse clean with hot water. Use specific chopping boards for vegetables, meat and seafood. Differentiate them using colour.
- **Mops:** Have separate mop heads for cleaning the kitchen, which might be greasy, and the rest of the home.



He carries nail polish remover for work

Hotel housekeeper Joseph Ling's trusted cleaning tools also include toothpaste and an eraser



ST PHOTOS
KELVIN CHING

WHAT'S IN A HOTEL HOUSEKEEPER'S POCKET?

Among the items Andaz Singapore's executive housekeeper Joseph Ling (left) carries:

- Paper napkins
- Green tea-scented nail polish remover sachets
- A pair of foldable scissors
- An eraser
- Measuring tape



Tan Hsueh Yun

At work, Andaz Singapore's executive housekeeper Joseph Ling walks around with bulging pockets.

From them, he produces a stack of green tea-scented nail polish remover sachets, a mini tube of toothpaste, measuring tape, paper napkins, an eraser, a pair of foldable scissors, a mini penknife, a wine waiter's corkscrew and a pen.

They help him in his work at the 342-room hotel in Fraser Street, where he oversees the 52 staff keeping the public areas, facilities, restaurants and guest rooms looking immaculate.

The 40-year-old, who has a bachelor's degree in hospitality management from Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, has been in the housekeeping business for 18 years and worked in other hotels before joining Andaz in the lead-up to its 2017 opening.

He is quick with cleaning tips and gives a rundown of what he uses the curious items in his pocket for: The toothpaste is good for removing lipstick and wine stains from rugs and carpets – rub a little on the stain with a soft cloth.

The eraser comes in handy for scuff marks on walls and wooden furniture. "Better than abrasive chemicals," he says.

He provides plenty of inspiration for people who want to pare down their lives and keep their homes spick and span.

At home – he is married without children – he takes charge of the cleaning, spending two to three hours on Saturdays tending to chores. This is on top of more frequent cleaning of high-traffic areas.

For instance, he cleans his sinks once every three days. He mixes one part white distilled vinegar with two parts water in a spray bottle, sprays the solution in the sink, waits 10 minutes and wipes it clean with a soft cloth.

Like the others, he is a firm believer in regular maintenance – not letting dirt build up, and advocates common, inexpensive cleaning agents such as vinegar, lemon juice and water.

In fact, that vinegar-and-water solution can also be used for cleaning glass, tile floors and toilet bowls. But do not use it on hardwood or marble surfaces.

He drills down to the fine details and regularly empties out drawers, removes dust, dirt and hair from them, and gives the insides a wipe before putting the contents back in.

"Just like in the hotel, regular maintenance at home is important," he says. "Dust collects fast."

At the end of the interview with The Sunday Times, he is asked what he does with the nail polish remover.

He chances on some scuff marks on a concrete planter box, whips out a sachet and wipes the ledge lightly.

The marks disappear completely.

MORE STORIES ON C4 and C5

SELLING DREAMS

Early Advertising in Singapore

LAST CALL – exhibition ends on 24 February 2019
Level 10, Gallery, National Library Building
Free Admission

Advertisements reflect society's desires, aspirations, ideals, hopes and insecurities. Featuring a myriad of advertising materials from the 1830s to 1960s in the National Library's collection, this exhibition explores the dreams behind the advertisements and how they have changed over time.

Catch it before it ends to learn more about Singapore's rich advertising heritage!



Clean Start To The Year

Making items as good as new

Stumped as to how to clean dirty household items? Madam Daphne Tan, 60, a showroom cleaner with Errands Service Provider, gives tips on how to make them look shiny again



Benson Ang
Lifestyle Correspondent



Thumbdrive
Pour a few drops of rubbing alcohol, which can be bought at the supermarket, onto a dry kitchen towel. Wipe off the grime and dry it with a piece of cloth.



Bag
Empty the contents. Hold the bag upside-down and shake it to remove dust or debris. Use wet wipes to clean the zip, buckles and handles. Air-dry the bag before using it again.



ST PHOTOS:
CHONG JUN LIANG

Fan
Remove the front cover. Use a wet cloth to wipe all surfaces, including the blades. Wipe the blades dry and reassemble the fan.



Camera dry box
Use a damp cloth or wet wipe to remove dust on the surface. Wipe dry. To clean the inside, use a dry cloth to wipe off dust.



AirPods
Use a wet wipe to clean any dust or dirt that may be resting on the ear pods. Use a cotton bud to clean the holes on the pods. Dry with a piece of cloth.



Soap dish
Place the soap dish into a container with about 500ml of warm water and a tablespoon of baking soda. Leave it for 15 to 30 minutes to let the soap residue soften. Then use a toothbrush to brush off any soap residue left. Rinse with water and wipe the soap holder dry.



Keys
Place them in a container and pour in a can of Coke. Leave for five to 15 minutes to remove residue or rust. Then pour away the Coke and rinse the keys with warm water. They should be sparkling clean. Dry them with a piece of cloth.



Hat
Use a dry cloth to dust the hat. Then use some sticky tape to remove the dirt. Take care not to wipe too vigorously so as not to damage the material. Spray some fabric refresher to mask odours.



Watch
Soak a cotton square in vinegar and wipe the band and watch surface meticulously to remove dust. Dry with a piece of cloth. For watches with leather straps, clean the strap with some leather conditioner dabbed on a piece of cotton cloth.



Trophy
Use a dry cloth to remove dust. Then squeeze some metal polish cream onto a piece of cloth and polish the trophy. Finish off by cleaning the entire surface with a dry cloth.



Telephone
Wipe the surface of the telephone set with a damp cloth, including the digit buttons, handset and cord. Spray disinfectant onto a piece of dry cloth and wipe clean.



Shawl
To remove a coffee stain, first mix equal parts dishwashing solution, white vinegar and warm water in a bowl. Dip a piece of cloth into the solution and tap it on the stain, which should disappear.

For red wine stains, dab the stain with a damp piece of cloth. Then sprinkle a generous amount of salt on the stain and wait for five minutes. Pour hot water over the stain and it should fade.



Get rid of the clutter

From bulky furniture to e-waste, there are places you can go to throw out, recycle or donate your pre-loved items

Benson Ang
Lifestyle Correspondent

With the start of a new year, it is time to get rid of all the clutter gathered during the old.

But what to do with those unwanted bulky items such as tables, chairs, cupboards and mattresses? And what about electronic waste such as wires, mobile phones, computers and batteries? Whether you live in a Housing Board flat or a private housing estate, The Sunday Times has got you covered.

Free disposal service for HDB dwellers

If you live in a Housing Board flat, contact your town council.

All 16 here offer a free bulky item-removal service, which is generally limited to three items a month. Some town councils specify that additional items are charged at \$5 each.

According to the Ang Mo Kio Town Council's website, a mattress and bed frame are considered two items. An L-shaped sofa, consisting of a three-seater and two-seater, counts as two items, while a dining table and two chairs are considered as three items.

A spokesman for Nee Soon Town Council says that the service provides convenience to its residents while ensuring the safety of the neighbourhood.

He says: "Improper disposal of bulky items at common areas may lead to fire hazard, hygiene and pest issues."

The service is available only to HDB residents of Nee Soon Town and not to private estate residents, adds the spokesman.

The conservancy contractors pick up the items directly from residents and these items are then usually stored at the bin centre, to be handed over to the waste disposal and recycling companies.

"In view of the increase in the volume of bulky items disposed of during the festive season, the town council also reaches out to residents through social media and publicity materials to remind them to make use of this service," says the spokesman.

Engage professionals in private estates

If you live in a private housing estate and want to dispose of bulky items, contact the public waste collector serving your estate.

As the removal of bulky items is not included in the standard service provided by these collectors, rates are separately negotiated. Alternatively, residents can engage a licensed waste collector to provide the removal service for a fee.

TBS Environmental Services, for example, offers waste-removal services to those living in private housing estates and provides open-top containers in various sizes, usually costing from \$350 to \$500.

The firm can also arrange for the removal of bulky items. One of its directors, Ms Zhang Shaozhen, 32, says unwanted furniture pieces make up most of the bulky waste collected from private residents and these items are sent directly to a private disposal plant.

E-waste bins for laptops and more

If you have e-waste, approach the telcos.

StarHub, for example, launched a recycling programme in 2012 called Renew – short for Recycling the Nation's Electronic Waste – which aims to encourage residents to recycle or throw away their e-waste in a responsible manner.

It has more than 460 Renew bins in educational institutions, malls, government offices and community clubs, as well as Best Denki, Courts, Gain City and Harvey Norman stores.

Its partner DHL manages the logistics of collecting and delivering the e-waste from all bins to an e-waste recycling facility under home-grown company TES, which recycles the e-waste collected.

Junior college student Chow Xin Tian, 17, who deposited a used computer keyboard and some cable wires at a Renew bin in a StarHub shop in Plaza Singapura last month, says: "I used to throw my used computer parts and electronic products in the trash."

"But now that I know about these bins, I try to use them because they are the most environment-friendly way to get rid of such products."

Singtel also launched a ReCYCLE programme with SingPost in 2017, which allows people to dispose of



Junior college student Chow Xin Tian has been using the Renew bins at StarHub for her used computer parts and electronic products.
ST PHOTO: KHALID BABA

their mobile and Internet-related e-waste, such as mobile phones, modems and cables, at selected Singtel shops, Singtel exclusive retailers, post offices and SingPost Lock + Store outlets with a ReCYCLE bin.

E-waste bins are also available at M1's headquarters and offices, as well as selected M1 Shops.

Mr Ivan Lim, the telco's director

of corporate communications and investor relations, says common items found in its e-waste bins include laptops, phones, cables, headphones, chargers, thumbdrives, modems, routers, keyboards and DVDs.

Singtel and M1's e-waste bins accept alkaline batteries, while StarHub's bins accept only lithium-ion batteries.

Madam Wong Kim Lean, 71, whose grandchild had used the cot, says: "The service is convenient and helpful, and more people should use it. At the end of the year, we try to get rid of broken things, so the home can be neat and clean for the new year."

A worker from Nee Soon Town Council drives a battery-operated cart with discarded mattresses to a bin centre in Yishun HDB estate.
ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE



Donate and recycle

You can donate pre-loved items – such as clothing, household goods, electronic devices, toys and books – to The Salvation Army through its eight donation-in-kind booths. They may be found at sg.salvationarmy.org/singapore/dik_its.

The charity's social enterprise arm, Red Shield Industries, processes the donated items and sells those in good condition at its family stores located across Singapore.

For donations of bulky items like furniture and big appliances, you may arrange for a door-to-door collection service.

The Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (Minds) also runs four thrift stores, carrying non-bulky furniture, clothes, collectibles and housewares that deserve a new lease of life.

Items which it takes in include clothes, bags, shoes, books, non-bulky furniture, kitchenware, musical instruments as well as electronic gadgets and home appliances which have been used for less than one year and are in good working condition.

Donors may drop off their items at the stores during operating hours. Minds can also provide pickup services for non-bulky furniture and consolidated donations from offices or residential homes.

A new Code for telling time

Audemars Piguet today launches a new collection consisting of 13 models crafted with new tools, skills and techniques



Wong Kim Hoh
In Le Brassus, Switzerland

Last September, luxury watch-maker Audemars Piguet (AP) invited me to its headquarters in the picturesque village of Le Brassus in Vallee de Joux, Switzerland.

But before the trip, I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement: I could not breathe a word of why I was there and what I was shown.

Well, I can finally let the cat out of the bag. For today is the day AP – one of the big three players of luxury watches alongside Vacheron Constantin and Patek Philippe – unveils a new collection of watches named Code 11.59 By Audemars Piguet.

What is the big deal about a new collection, you may ask.

Well, it is the brand's first in more than a quarter of a century. AP has pulled out all the stops too: There are 13 models housing six in-house movements, three of which are new.

“And it's not the Royal Oak,” quips the flamboyant Francois-Henry Bennahmias, head honcho of the brand.

The Royal Oak, of course, is the company's cash cow and one of the world's most iconic watches.

Designed in less than a day by Gerald Genta in 1971, it is named after a famous battleship of the British Royal Navy and inspired by a classic diver's helmet. It has a distinctive octagonal bezel secured with eight screws, a tapisserie dial and an integrated bracelet.

Since entering the market in 1972 as the “world's first luxury sports watch”, the Royal Oak has spawned an army of iterations. They interpret the basic concept in many ways through the use of different movements, materials, sizes and colours, including a new “deconstructed” line, the Royal Oak Offshore, in 1993.

Last year, AP introduced the Royal Oak RD#2, the world's thinnest automatic perpetual calendar; and the Ladies' Royal Oak Concept Flying Tourbillon, its first Royal Oak concept watch for women.

The fervour for the iconic timepiece has not abated; buying one often entails first getting on a waitlist.

CODE 11.59 BY AUDEMARS PIGUET



AP, expected to hit one billion Swiss francs (\$1.37 billion) in sales last year, does not need a new collection to shore up its business.

“We've been experiencing double-digit growth without increasing quantities,” says Mr Bennahmias of the brand, which caps production at about 40,000 timepieces a year to maintain exclusivity.

The new collection, instead, is a challenge AP took upon itself to show that it is more than just a one-trick pony.

He acknowledges that the Royal Oak is a big part of AP's business.

“But when you think about the history of the company, we have lived without the Royal Oak more years than we did with it. The company is 144 years old, the Royal Oak is 47. We decided to show people we could do things other than the Royal Oak,” says Mr Bennahmias in Le Brassus, where the company is in the midst of building a new museum and a new hotel.

Code 11.59 has been long in the making, says the witty Frenchman, who joined the company in 1994 and became its chief honcho six years ago.

The name was chosen, he says, because it means “being ahead of your game”.

“It also means that by midnight, it will be a completely new day for the brand. And we've never been more ready to launch a new line.”

His brief to his staff when work started on the watch was “to push every single detail about craft as far as possible”.

“We want to show the world all the talents we have at AP.”

With great flourish, he unveils the collection, which comprises four automatics, four chronographs, a perpetual calendar, two flying tourbillons, an openworked tourbillon and a minute repeater supersonnerie. All are rendered in white or pink gold.

Mr Bennahmias says crafting the Code 11.59 – which is for both men and women – called for new tools, skills and techniques.

“People who worked for and with us called us the craziest and most challenging brand they've worked with.

“More than once, some said, ‘We're giving up. I can't. You're asking too much.’ It's like the world record for the 100m is 9.58 seconds and we're asking people to run it in seven.”

While handsome enough, the collection does not come across as extraordinary. But that old chestnut about the devil being in the details holds true here.

The case, with a 41mm diameter, is unique, with an octagonal middle-case embedded within a round case. Because of the ultra-thin bezel, the open-worked lugs have to be welded, necessitating a new production process.

The double curved glare-proofed glass covering the case drove the manufacturers crazy, says the head honcho.

The glass' internal surface is dome-shaped while the external surface is vertically curved from six to 12 o'clock, resulting in a unique optical experience.

Most of the pieces boast lacquered dials.

“With lacquer, you scratch it just by looking at it,” he jokes.

“Each dial requires between eight and 12 coats of lacquer. The manipulation of the dial is very tricky. We basically have to redo at least 30 or 40 per cent.”

Mr Bennahmias then directs the attention to the unique 3-D AP logo, fashioned from thin layers of gold.

“Most logos are printed, but this is in boxed letters,” he says, adding that the logo, which boasts tiny legs the size of a strand of a hair, is painstakingly placed on the dial by hand.

The watches will be unveiled at international watch fair Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, which starts in Geneva tomorrow.

They will be sold only in AP boutiques, he adds.

“We want to secure the integrity of the experience. The real thing happens in the stores, where sales folks will have to make it work.”

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There are 13 models in Code 11.59 By Audemars Piguet, a collection of timepieces which the brand says is designed for both men and women.

Perpetual Calendar

This is a handsome astronomical watch, its 18-karat pink gold case housing a stunning blue aventurine dial and subdials.

Aventurine glass was discovered accidentally in the 17th century

in a Murano glass factory when copper filings were inadvertently dropped into cooling molten glass, resulting in a galaxy of sparkling particles. The blue, in this case, comes from the introduction of black copper oxide and cobalt.

The watch is powered by the Calibre 5134 and boasts a perpetual calendar, which automatically adjusts short months and adds a day to February each leap year.



Minute Repeater Sonnerie

This watch has an 18-karat white gold case, which beautifully complements the blue enamel dial, white gold hands and applied indexes and numerals.

Its pull factor is its chiming watch acoustics and exceptional sound performance. The gongs are not attached to the mainplate, but to a new device which acts as a soundboard, enhancing sound transmission.

Powered by the Calibre 2953, it is 6mm thick and has an arresting soundwave caseback design.



Tourbillon Openworked

This is a beauty with the Calibre 2948, an intricate hand-wound skeletal tourbillon movement.

The 18-karat gold case is a fitting foil to the dark openworked mainplate and bridges which

have been specially crafted for this collection.

The movement, 4.97mm thick, boasts 70 hand-polished V angles, accentuating the intricacy of the openworking art. This tourbillon has a power reserve of 80 hours.



Self-winding

There are four models, fashioned from white or rose gold and boasting a lacquered white, black or blue dial. The watch houses the Calibre 4302, a new self-winding movement which features a 22-karat gold oscillating weight.

It features an applied 3-D Audemars Piguet logo as well as curved gold indexes and Arabic numerals. The self-winding model comes with a hand-stitched “large square scale” brown or black alligator leather strap and is water-resistant to 30m.



Self-winding Flying Tourbillon

Rendered in white or pink gold, this piece comes either with a smoked blue or black enamel dial.

It is fitted with the self-winding manufacture Calibre 2950, which features a central rotor and a flying tourbillon – a first for Audemars Piguet.

It also features an enamel transferred logo and a lacquered black inner bezel.



Self-winding Chronograph

Like the self-winding model, this chronograph also comes in four versions – in white or rose gold and a lacquered blue or black dial.

It is powered by the Calibre 4401, another new in-house movement which comes with an instant jumpdate indication, integrated column wheel chronograph and flyback function.

That means you can restart the chronograph without having to stop and reset it first.

The dedicated 22-karat pink gold openworked oscillating weight is visible through the caseback. Water-resistant to 30m, it has a power reserve of 70 hours.

PHOTOS: AUDEMARS PIGUET

Love in 200 words

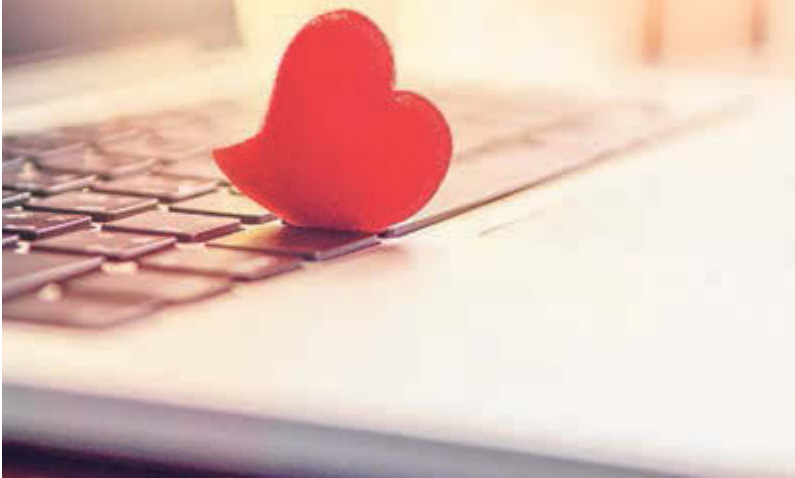
This Valentine's Day, The Straits Times invites you to tell us a love story in miniature

Send us a story about love – true, imagined, funny, sad, yours, anybody's – in 200 words, 200 being the magic number this Bicentennial year. We will publish the best entries on Feb 10.

- All entries must be 200 words or fewer.
- The Straits Times reserves the right to curate, edit and publish the entries at its discretion.
- Entries should not contain profanity or graphic language.

Send your entry to stlife@sph.com.sg by Jan 31 with “LOVE STORY” in the e-mail subject line, along with the following details:

- Your full name as in your NRIC
- Your date of birth
- Your mobile phone number
- Your e-mail address



Successful ageing



Madam Rukamani (standing) with the Padmanabhans. PHOTO: TED CHEN

Creating ties that bind

Befriender Rukamani Subramaniam goes the extra mile to help socially-isolated seniors feel included

Joshua Wong

No man is an island. Yet many individuals in society, especially the elderly, often find themselves isolated due to various reasons.

But Madam Rukamani Subramaniam is doing her part to change that. Under the Community Befriending Programme (CBP), an initiative connecting befrienders with socially isolated seniors, the 65-year-old volunteer goes the extra mile to build relationships with these individuals and reintegrate them into the community through social outings and other activities.

"Coming into contact with these different people gives me insight into their lives, their struggles and what they are going through. This is very meaningful for me, and I am glad that I am able to help them," she says.

Madam Rukamani has befriended six residents since joining the programme six years ago. She volunteers with the THK Social Services @ Bukit Batok East under Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities (THKMC).

The THK centre regularly hosts activities and games for the community that it serves, such as qigong, handicraft sessions and karaoke sessions on weekdays.

Many people just need someone to talk to, and it is good to see what I can do for them.



MADAM RUKUMANI SUBRAMANIAM, 65
BEFRIENDER

Madam Rukamani currently befriends a couple, the Padmanabhans. Although they live with their daughter and grandson, their daughter, who is a teacher, often works late and is unable to spend much time with them.

In 2017, Mr Govindan Nair Padmanabhan went for a knee operation and had to make multiple trips to the hospital. His wife was his primary caregiver, but it took a toll on her.

Thankfully, Madam Rukamani was on hand to provide support for the couple during this difficult time. She made regular appointments to meet them in their home, checking that everything was in order and that Mr Padmanabhan was taking his medication.

"They were very friendly and welcoming, and always made time for me even though Mr Padmanabhan was sick," she says.

Since then, she has accompanied them on an excursion to Singapore Zoo last July, along with other CBP participants, and has joined them in various games and events hosted at the THK centre. These activities were avenues for the couple to meet others in the community.

PART OF COMMUNITY

Mr Padmanabhan has greatly enjoyed making new friends through the programme. In the past, he and his wife would mostly spend their days on their own. Now, they are familiar faces in their neighbourhood.

"When we see people outside, in the supermarket or on the street, they greet us. It makes us happy to know so many people — it is much better than sitting at home alone!" says Mr Padmanabhan.

Madam Rukamani is glad that she is a befriender, and encourages others to follow suit.

"I enjoy being a volunteer. Many people just need someone to talk to, and it is good to see what I can do for them," she says.

The CBP is run by 17 community organisations all across Singapore. These include Fei Yue Community Services, Presbyterian Community Services, St Hilda's Community Services Centre and Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities.

To be a befriender, sign up at www.moh.gov.sg/befriendasenior, or call the Singapore Silver Line at 1800-650-6060, Monday to Friday (8.30am to 8.30pm) and Saturday (8.30am to 4pm). It is not operational on public holidays.

This series is an initiative under the Action Plan for Successful Ageing.

I feel young when I make new friends!



Community Befriending Programme

Drink kopi, share some laughs, make a friend.

1 Be their friend

Connect with seniors in your neighbourhood, start enduring friendships.

2 Be their eyes and ears

Listen to their problems and lend them a helping hand.

3 Be fulfilled

When you help someone, it makes you feel good too.

Sign up at
www.moh.gov.sg/befriendasenior
or call the Singapore Silver Line at
1800 650 6060* today.

*Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 8.30pm or
Saturday: 8.30am to 4pm except public holidays.

ifeelyoungSG



The road to freedom

My son began taking public transport on his own recently and his growing independence has not only freed up much of my time, but also built up his confidence



Tee Hun Ching

The new school year dawned with four letters hanging over me like the sword of Damocles: PSLE. Even if I wanted to, well-meaning friends were not going to let me forget that my son is sitting the Primary School Leaving Examination this year.

One girlfriend, whose son is facing the same gruelling journey, sent me a New Year greeting via WhatsApp along with the PSLE schedule.

Two other friends dropped off revision notes that their kids, now safely past the hurdle, had found useful.

But the hot topic among my group of mummy friends during the first two weeks of school had nothing to do with the dreaded exam.

Instead, we were all training our boys to master something else that's equally, if not more, important: taking public transport on their own.

Some parenting experts say a clear sign that your child is ready to take this leap is when he asks to do so. My son, who turns 12 this year, has been begging to take the bus home from school since last year.

"My friends are making fun of me, saying that I am over-protected," he complained.

Some of his friends have been getting around on their own for several years and he took the bus with them once after school last year to have lunch nearby.

That whetted his appetite for going it alone, but I didn't think he was ready for it.

His school was a good distance from the bus stop and he would have to cross two busy main roads to get there. Given his dreamy self, I was worried that he wouldn't be able to make his way there safely, hop onto the right connecting bus or get off at the right stop.

But they say successful parenting involves knowing when to let go. I decided recently it was time he ventured out alone.

So he began travelling to and from his tuition centre by bus during the year-end school break.

The straightforward journey served as a good dry run. There are several direct bus services that ply between our place and the centre, and the ride takes at most 25 minutes each way.

Besides, I've driven the same route many times and pointed out to him the stops he should alight at or board the bus from.

He made multiple trips without incident over the holidays. So when school reopened, we agreed that he could advance to the next level.

The journey home from school by

bus is a little more complicated. It's different from, and longer than, the way we usually take by car and involves switching to another bus midway.

I mapped out the route for him, made him memorise the bus service numbers for both legs of the trip and repeated the key safety dos and don'ts.

Then I found out several friends were also prepping their kids to go solo.

K told her son to take the bus to a nearby mall after school and waited for him at the stop as a trial.

P was tireless in her test run. She parked her car near the school after dropping her son off one morning and took the bus home. She wanted to gauge the time needed and flag the things that her son should take note of along the way.

Then she went back to pick up her car, drove home, rode the bus back to school and took it home again with her son.

That happened to be the day my son was making his debut journey home from school alone and she ran into him at the bus stop.

"He just got on the bus," she texted, 15 minutes after school let out. I was grateful for her message, as I had yet to hear from my son.

Then she spotted the dad of one of our boys' schoolmates "hiding behind some bushes" near the bus stop.

His son was apparently making his first commute via public transit too and we reckoned he was there to make sure he would get home in one piece.

It's hard not to think about all the things that could go wrong – from minor scrapes to major accidents – when your child first strikes out on his own.

He could fall, board the wrong bus or miss his stop. Or he could get lost, robbed or mowed down by a car.

The same thoughts must have crossed our parents' minds years ago, back when they could neither track our movements nor confirm our safety via mobile phones. Yet we were allowed out on our own at a far younger age and were none the worse for it.

And despite – or perhaps because of – the easy access to people and information that mobile devices grant us, we somehow perceive the world today as a far more dangerous place. We grapple with the niggling fear that our kids risk being harmed every moment that they are unsupervised.

But child experts have a refrain: The best way to protect your children is to make them confident,



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

not swaddle them with cotton wool.

We can do a dry run with them, arm them with directions and coach them on how to ask strangers for help if need be. But eventually, the leash has to come off.

As Lenore Skenazy, who wrote the book *Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Children The Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts With Worry*, wrote in a 2015 column: "To become street-smart and self-reliant requires spending some time doing things on your own."

The New Yorker was dubbed "America's worst mom" after letting her then nine-year-old son ride the subway on his own in 2008 and writing about it.

The furore that ensued prompted

her to launch the "Free-Range Kids" movement, which challenges parents to not be shackled by fear but give children the freedom they need to grow and develop critical life skills.

I didn't realise it, but driving my son had become our daily bonding ritual.

I miss the random conversations we used to have and the window to his life that they offered. I miss him confiding in me because not having to look at me while I kept my eyes on the road just made it easier for him to unload sometimes.

But his growing independence has freed up much of my time and boosted his self-confidence. He has made his way back without a hitch on wet days and drizzly nights,

even picking up some school supplies or favourite snacks along the way.

He is proving that he can keep his wits about him when I'm not around to act as his safety net.

When my son looks back on 2019, I hope the stress of making it through the PSLE is but a faint memory.

Instead, I hope he cherishes it as a year of far more important milestones: the year he sat on the cusp of adolescence and tasted freedom for the first time; the year he ventured out without mum and dad and realised, "Hey, I can do this – and I can do a lot more than this."

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My daughter is outgoing. How is that a problem?

Mark Oppenheimer

Last month, my wife told our five-year-old daughter, Anna, that because we'd be out of town on an upcoming weekend, Anna would have to decline an invitation she'd received.

It was a birthday party for a boy I'll call Ben.

"Oh, can't we please stay home?" Anna implored. "I really want to go to Ben's party."

"But Anna," my wife said, "you don't like Ben."

Anna looked at her, perplexed. "That's true," she said. "But I like parties!"

Such are the travails of raising an extrovert.

For Anna, there is no such thing as a bad party. No night can drag on too long; no guest can overstay her welcome.

People, she believes, are born to be together. For her, if solitude is not quite a vice, it is at best an inexplicable lapse in taste.

How extreme is Anna's extroversion?

One day, she wouldn't leave kindergarten until she had said goodbye to, and hugged, every child in the room.

Because most kids her age don't take telephone calls, she likes to call my best friend since childhood, now a man of 45, on the phone. She can never connect enough.

In the 15 years since Jonathan Rauch wrote his influential essay *Caring For Your Introvert*, his pro-introvert dogma has been preached in scores of articles, television news segments and books.

We have all been instructed that introverts are special, underappreciated and, to quote

Rauch, "wildly" misunderstood.

I don't dissent, entirely. I love introverts. My wife is one. Our house is the seat of a mixed marriage.

Very much Anna's father, I like it when religious missionaries or political canvassers ring my bell. I may not join their church or fund their cause, but I will always give them a half-hour of front-stoop conversation.

Then there's my wife, who declines to answer the phone, not out of fear that it might be a robocall but because it might be a person.

To her credit, my wife, whose perfect New Year's Eve can be summed up as hot chocolate, a novel and lights out at 10, has taught me to better appreciate Anna's older sister, our eight-year-old, who survives any large social gathering by finding a quiet corner in which to reread Louisa May Alcott or J.K. Rowling, or by making one friend to pull aside for private conversation.

Once upon a time, I might have insisted that Klara join the party. I now know better, and I marvel at how well she copes with a world that always seems too loud and too close.

Nevertheless, there is definitely something self-serving, brilliantly so, in the militant introverts' argument that they are superior – calmer, more patient, more compassionate – yet always vulnerable. They are both special and especially oppressed. They

have unique wisdom but also need unique care.

Seriously? Is it the introverts whom parents have to worry about? They seem designed to dodge danger, what with all that keeping their heads down, doing their work, avoiding poisonous high school gossip.

By contrast, consider the plight of the extrovert snowed in during school vacation, with no friends to organise and boss around.

Christmas week is tough for Anna; without four siblings, she'd be lost. And what will happen when the day comes and I have to tell her that, given our limited budget and large family, she might want to consider a small, intimate wedding?

The world can be unkind to children who enjoy connecting. We're all on guard, and for children to refuse to believe in "stranger danger" is particularly suspect. Antisocial is the new social.

One time, three summers ago, Anna and I entered a mostly empty playground on a summer morning. Before running to the swings, she noticed an old woman sitting on a bench, alone, blinking slowly into the sunlight. Anna walked over.

"I'm Anna," she said. "What's your name?"

The woman refused to answer, instead beckoning to me.

"Good morning," I said.

"You better tell your little girl not to talk to people," she said sourly, then made a show of turning away. That woman meant well, I think.

We live in suspicious times and she feared what might happen to a child – a girl – who refused to obey the new conventions of distance, caution, unfriendliness.

Me, I worry that after another encounter like that one, Anna will simply give up on talking to old people in parks. Which would be a shame.

Right now, she's at an age when it's relatively easy to be exuberant, but as children – especially girls – get older, there is pressure to be more reserved, more "poised".

True, as introverts age, they are pressured to speak up, which can be hard for them; but as extroverts grow up, they are sometimes expected to modulate, to pipe down, to shrink themselves.

I hope Anna never stops talking to strangers or dancing. I probably don't have to worry.

I remember another time, a summer later, when we arrived at the perfect spot on a crowded New Jersey beach. I pitched our umbrella, opened up the folding chairs and asked Anna if she wanted to go in for a swim.

"Not yet," she said. "First I have to go meet people."

She walked to the umbrella next to ours, got in the face of a beer-bellied man in sunglasses reading a Michael Connelly thriller and said, "Hi, I'm Anna!"

WASHINGTON POST

• The writer directs the Yale Journalism Initiative and hosts the podcast *Unorthodox*.

Infertility can be a man's problem too



There is no clear reason for the global decline in semen quality, but it has been linked to diverse factors such as exposure to chemicals, pollution, stress and an unhealthy diet. PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

Rising male infertility rates here mirror the global phenomenon of declining sperm quality, say doctors



Venessa Lee

When Don (not his real name) found out the reason he and his wife could not conceive after trying for 1½ years, he was devastated.

The 40-year-old was diagnosed as having a low sperm count after the couple had fertility checks done at a hospital about four years ago.

"I kept saying sorry to my wife. We are family-oriented and believed we could be good parents," Don, who works in sales, recalls.

His 37-year-old wife works in the education sector.

Like other men with fertility issues, there were no other obvious symptoms, apart from the fact that the couple were not able to conceive.

While there is generally more discussion on female infertility in the media, male infertility is on the rise in Singapore.

Hospitals and fertility clinics are reporting a spike in the number of such cases in recent years, which doctors attribute in part to changing societal attitudes towards reproduction.

More couples are now willing to get tested, especially after a year of trying for a baby in vain, a general benchmark indicating possible fertility issues. This results in more cases of male infertility being uncovered, says Dr Yeong Cheng Toh, a fertility specialist at Virtus Fertility Centre Singapore.

Compared with the past, when women traditionally bore the stigma of infertility and childless-

ness, "couples are now more equal in their approach", he notes.

Dr Valerie Gan, a consultant urologist at Singapore General Hospital (SGH), adds: "There is more awareness of the man's role in infertility issues."

SGH has seen a five-fold increase in male infertility cases, from 10 new cases in 2015 to 50 last year.

Some providers of fertility services report a leap of more than 70 per cent of such cases.

The number of patients who sought treatment at the male infertility clinic at National University Hospital (NUH) rose about 80 per cent in three years. About 270 patients were seen last year, compared with slightly more than 150 in 2015.

Virtus Fertility Centre Singapore saw a 72 per cent increase in male infertility cases from 2015 to 2017. The centre had close to 400 male infertility cases in 2017, of which about 80 per cent featured diagnoses of low sperm count and/or poor sperm quality.

While there is a lack of nationwide data regarding male reproductive health, doctors say rising male infertility rates here mirror the global phenomenon of declining sperm quality in the last 40 years.

Dr Joe Lee, consultant and director of andrology and male reproductive medicine at NUH's department of urology, says that in his experience, it is not uncommon to see men with lower sperm count.

More men are also having zero sperm count. General semen quality is getting poorer globally, he adds, referring to World Health Organisation (WHO) data over the years.

The organisation's first edition of its laboratory manual for semen analysis was published in 1980. The standards by which it gauges the parameters for "normal" sperm have been progressively lowered over the decades.

For its fourth publication on semen analysis in 1999, it assessed "normal" human semen as containing at least 20 million sperm per millilitre of semen (the fluid containing sperm), with a motility rate of at least 50 per cent. Motility

Lifestyle changes, such as quitting smoking, eating better and exercising to reduce obesity, can help men with fertility problems.

refers to the ability of the sperm to move towards the egg to fertilise it, resulting in pregnancy.

But these measures had declined by the time the latest WHO guidelines were published in 2010, when "normal" human semen was assessed to contain at least 15 million sperm per millilitre of semen, with a motility rate of at least 40 per cent.

In a study reported in 2017, scientists at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem found that sperm counts among men in the West have more than halved in the past 40 years.

There is no clear reason for the global decline, physicians and scientists say, but it has been linked to a diverse range of factors such as exposure to chemicals, pollution, stress and an unhealthy diet.

While there are many reasons for male infertility, common causes are low sperm count or motility, or abnormal sperm.

Lifestyle changes, such as quitting smoking, eating better and exercising to reduce obesity, can help men with fertility problems. Treatments include surgery to retrieve sperm, hormone medication and treatment for problems with sexual intercourse.

Two surgical operations, in 2015 and 2017, as well as changes to his lifestyle were what Don had to undergo after his problem was diagnosed.

To try and boost his fertility levels, he exercised more to achieve optimum health. Although some of the treatment costs were subsidised, he and his wife saved up about \$15,000 for surgery, medication, regular injections and in-vitro fertilisation (IVF).

Don says he also had to fend off, with a "smile", queries from friends and family about when he and his wife were going to have kids.

He sometimes wondered: "Is there going to be a light at the end of the tunnel?"

It was a gruelling time for the couple, who have been married for seven years, especially after the first sperm-retrieval procedure, which was unsuccessful. But the second operation was successful.

Dr Gan from SGH, who is also

director of the hospital's sub-fertility service, says the majority of male infertility patients she sees are in their 30s and 40s, like Don. "It is the peak age when couples start having kids and growing their family."

She notes that social trends of marrying later play a role in encouraging couples to get tested for infertility, which may lead to more men being diagnosed with sperm issues.

Statistics show that more women are tying the knot later, with the median age for first-time brides at 28.4 years in 2017, compared with 27.2 years in 2007.

While a woman's age is a major factor in her fertility, sperm mutations and a decline in sperm count in older men are also thought to reduce the chances of pregnancy.

The traditional perception, that the woman is usually the infertile partner when couples fail to conceive, has shifted.

Dr Gan says: "In the past, when couples struggle to conceive, the first step was for the woman to see a gynaecologist. Even now, a lot of women will get themselves checked first. But women are also more open now to asking their husbands to get checked."

NUH's Dr Lee has seen how some couples are seeking medical help earlier, compared with when they might take eight years before "muster up the courage or energy".

But he says, in his experience, "few men come of their own accord". Perhaps because the woman's motivation to conceive is higher in such cases, many men will come forward when urged by their wives, he adds.

Undergoing fertility challenges can change relationships.

Don says: "My wife and I went through a lot, but we had self-belief. Even if IVF failed, we would still have gone on as a couple. The experience has only strengthened our bond."

And yes, they did see the light at the end of the tunnel. Last year, they had a daughter, who is now four months old, after their first IVF cycle.

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Eat your heart out in Tel Aviv

The Israeli city tantalises the taste buds with one of the most diverse dining scenes in the world

Suzanne Sng

I travelled to Tel Aviv with zero expectation, except that it was going to be hot, hot, hot. I did not expect to find the world's latest dining hotspot. The food scene in this Israeli city is sizzling and ready to boil over.

Almost every meal – from acclaimed restaurants to hole-in-the-wall local haunts – blew me away, with flavours and ingredients melding together in new and unusual ways.

Even recognisable Middle Eastern dishes, such as shakshuka, falafel and hummus, tasted fresher, brighter and just simply better.

Chef Bino Gabso, better known as Dr Shakshuka, owns a long-standing restaurant by the same name and is a prominent personality on the city's food scene.

He says: "Tel Aviv has definitely become a great destination for food lovers from all over the world. We have so many amazing things to offer and tourists react accordingly. We are one of the most sought-after cities for real foodies."

Agreeing with him is chef-owner Dan Arvatz of Bana, one of the most exciting vegan restaurants in the city, who says: "Tel Aviv is one of the best places to eat at."

"Generally, the laid-back atmosphere with the culinary knowledge and Mediterranean background that people brought with them as they moved to Israel over the years got really developed and was made into an essence of pride in our culture."

Gabso, whose Libyan parents started a restaurant in the old town of Jaffa (considered part of Tel Aviv) in the 1950s, adds: "Tel Aviv, like Israel as a whole, is a melting pot of multiple cultures."

"Each and every ethnicity has its own unique cuisine – Persian, Moroccan, Libyan, Indian, you just name it."

"That's why we have so much diversity here and everyone can find something to his liking."

Besides being a melting pot of food cultures, the city also lays out a true farm-to-table experience – long before the term became a buzzword.

Israel produces an astounding 95 per cent of its food requirements, despite the inhospitable climate, lack of water, and its size – the entire country is accessible within two hours.

That makes for super fresh produce, as seen in the city's many vibrant markets known as shuks, such as Shuk HaCarmel and Levinsky Market, as well as newer covered food halls, such as Shuk HaNahal and Sarona Food Market.

Only what is in season makes it to the kitchens.

One of the biggest draws of dining out in the city is that it is unpretentious, welcoming and imbued with an intense passion for food, from the top tables to local haunts. Unfussy, laid-back, genuine – much like the city's inhabitants – Tel Aviv is on the cusp of being a foodie destination like New York, London or Paris.

Here are my top 10 picks, based on local recommendations, from my week there.

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• Suzanne Sng is a former Straits Times journalist now based in Paris as an independent editorial consultant.

GETTING THERE

There are no direct flights from Singapore to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion International Airport. Singapore Airlines (www.singapore-air.com) flies there via cities such as Bangkok or Rome.

Getting around is easy on foot or by bike if you stay near Rothschild Boulevard, an artery of walking and cycling paths running through the city.

The Gett app is highly recommended if you need to get a cab, as it is fast and safe. You pay by credit card and rate the drivers after each ride.

TIPS

• Three words: sunscreen, sunscreen, sunscreen. I neglected to apply it one afternoon before exploring the markets and ended up 50 shades darker. Evenings are balmy and cool, so opt for alfresco dining if possible.

• It may be hard to find a place to buy Israeli currency (shekels) in Singapore, so prepare cash in US dollars and change money when you arrive in Tel Aviv. Alternatively, you can withdraw cash in the local currency from ATMs there. Credit cards are accepted at most restaurants, but not in the markets or smaller shops.

• Security is known to be intense at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion International Airport, so give yourself ample time to go through the formalities. While the officers are professional, polite and friendly, they do ask quite a few questions, so make sure you have all your documents with you. For instance, I was in Tel Aviv for a friend's wedding and they asked to see the wedding invitation. Expect the same level of scrutiny even on departure.



1
BANA

Nahmani Street 36
Even in a city with more than 400 vegan and vegetarian restaurants, one-year-old vegan restaurant Bana (above) stands out with its innovative menu.

No bland quinoa bowls here. Original dishes include broiled asparagus and okra topped with a black garlic sauce and nutritional yeast (right), and burnt beets with nectarine and radish.

Fantastically fresh produce is treated simply and paired in unusual flavour combinations, taking plant-based cuisine to the next level. It is a cliché, but you really will not miss the meat.



4
NORTH ABRAXASS

Lilienblum Street 40
Yotam Ottolenghi reckons this is the best restaurant in the city and, judging by how hard it is to snag a table, many agree with the acclaimed Israeli-British chef.

At this laid-back restaurant, there are no plates. Instead, you chow down messily on brown paper dishes with descriptive names such as Lamb Melting Into A Soft Bun (above) and Baby Cauliflower, A Golden Flower Melting Into Itself and Sweet Potato That You Eat With Your Hands.

Run by celebrity chef Eyal Shani, the restaurant has a menu that changes according to the produce available that day.



3
TAIZU

Derech Menachem Begin 23

You might think, why go all the way to Israel to eat fusion food inspired by South-east Asia? But then you would be missing out on some truly creative takes on familiar favourites, such as har gow (shrimp dumplings) with crunchy Jerusalem artichokes and wild fish and roe served with soy foam in a rice cracker cone (right).

Rather fancy and expensive, the restaurant has won a slew of Best Restaurant awards. For a more casual vibe, choose to eat at the bar and banter with the bartender.



PHOTOS: SUZANNE SNG, BANA



7
ANITA

Shabazi Street 40
Wilting under the merciless sun while exploring the indie enclave of Neve Tzedek, we take refuge in this ice-cream parlour, known for having the best scoops in town.

Tiramisu and hazelnut mousse? Salted caramel with white chocolate? One scoop of each, please. Fat-free, sugar-free and soy-based options are available, but I say, go all out for the full-cream flavours, which are luxuriously creamy without any hint of grainy iciness.



8
FALAFEL HAKOSEM

Shlomo ha-Melekh Street 1
What is not to like about balls of ground chickpeas (and sometimes fava beans) that are deep-fried till golden, fragrant and crumbly?

The street snack is ubiquitous in the region and no one does it better than Hakosem.

There is a snaking line of mostly locals at this casual outdoor eatery (above) also serving chicken schnitzel and sabich, even way past lunchtime, but the friendly guys behind the counter though fully dole out free freshly fried falafel while you shuffle along in line.

Go for the shawarma (thin slices of marinated meat stacked and cooked in a rotisserie) wrapped in pillowy flatbread called lafa (right) and, if you decide to get more falafel as a side, no one will judge you for it.



9
SHERRY HERRING

Nemal Tel Aviv Street 12
Blink and you will miss this much-raved-about pickled herring sandwich (above) counter in the Shuk HaNahal market.

The fishiness of the herring is offset by the sweet onions and sour bits of pickles, with just enough cream cheese to bind everything together in a crusty golden baguette.

Oh, and there are slivers of red chilli to make your tongue do a little dance.



5
SABICH

SABICH TCHERNICHOVSKY

Tchernichovsky Street 2

This unassuming counter (above) beloved by locals churns out little pita pockets (right) of perfection. Stuffed in the sabich are crispy, melt-fried eggplant, smooth hummus, crunchy pickles, slaw, spring onions, sliced boiled egg and more, all drizzled with tahini.

This vegetarian street food may not be as well known as the falafel, but it is hugely popular in the city and is said to have originated from Iraqi Jews.

Each masterpiece is lovingly assembled only when you order and you have to queue, then gobble it down by the road while the ingredients dribble all over your sandals – but it is so worth it.



6
ABU HASSAN

Ha-Dolfin Street 1

Get ready for a life-changing plate of hummus (right). Abu Hassan will make you question how pure chickpeas with sesame seeds, olive oil, lemon and garlic can become pure magic.

At the no-frills eatery, Jews and Arabs, locals and tourists, all sit at the same table.

Service is so efficient that at peak hours, waiters will exhort diners to hurry up in Arabic by yelling "Yalla! Yalla!"

There is no menu and our waiter decides unilaterally to serve us obviously tourists – the sampler platter.

Four variations on the humble chickpea in one plate is planked before us, together with a stack of pitas, sweet raw onions and a devastatingly tangy and spicy green pepper-garlic-lemon sauce



that made everything sing in a heavenly chorus. This off-the-beaten-path eatery has been rated as the best in the country on every list – and rightly so.



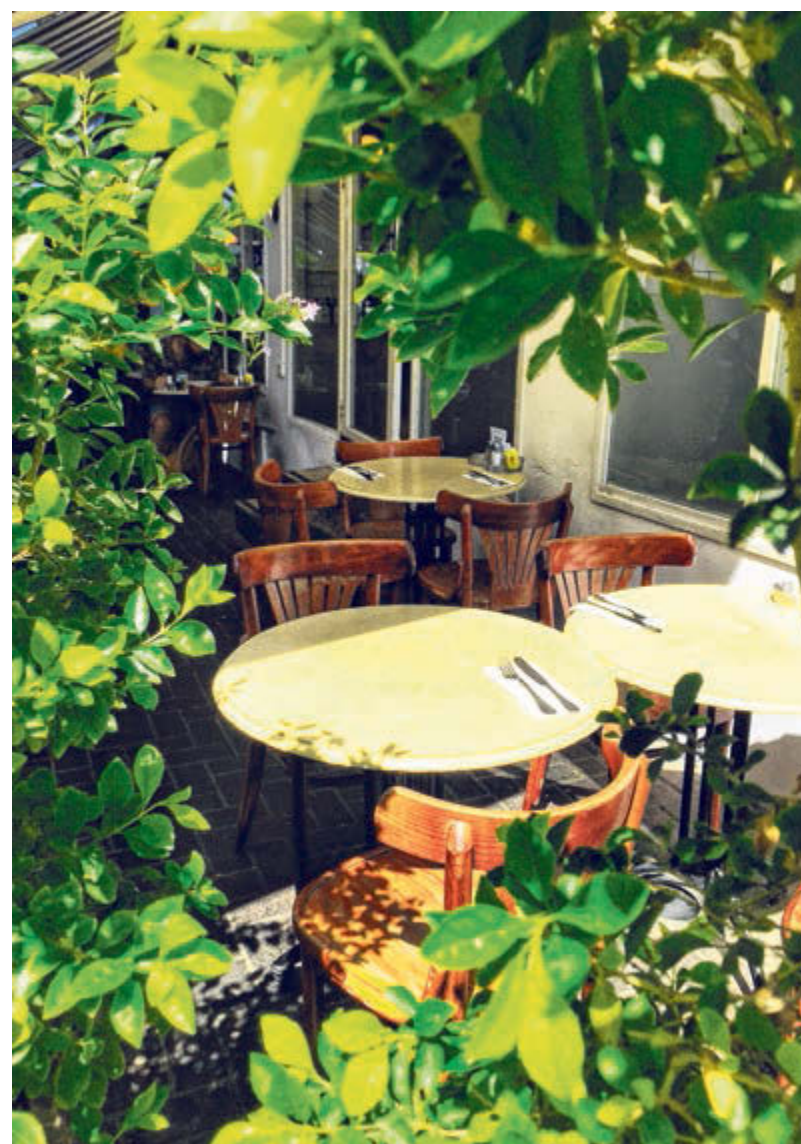
10
BENEDICT

Rothschild Boulevard 29

This all-day breakfast institution, which opened in 2006, dishes out a huge spread of breakfast fare.

Besides the excellent eggs Benedict (above) that it is named after, the restaurant has also perfected the recipe for thick custodial stacks of buttermilk pancakes (with a sinful mound of fresh whipped cream on the side).

Try the Israeli breakfast of three eggs that comes with a hearty number of sides, including labneh (cream cheese made from yogurt), feta cheese, tuna salad, tomatoes, olives and more. Perfect for a lazy brunch or late-night supper.



Stockholm's design delights

From subway stations to street art to children's playgrounds, the capital of Sweden offers a rainbow of inspiring spaces and places



Swedish subway stations are lively canvases of educational and inspiring art, such as a rainbow mural at Stadion (above).

Grace Ma

In Stockholm, places and spaces are designed to inspire and delight. As I was gazing in admiration at a collection of paintings, I became suddenly aware that the room lighting had changed. The shades covering the grand arched windows, which I had not noticed until then, were scrolling upwards.

In that moment, the Swedish capital's misty beauty on a crisp autumn morning unveiled itself like a piece of framed art.

I was in the 152-year-old Nationalmuseum (www.nationalmuseum.se, free admission except for specific themed exhibitions). Sweden's national museum of art and design. It reopened in October after an extensive five-year renovation to modernise its facilities as well as to expand the number of exhibits and double visitor capacity.

The former white walls are now clad in rich colours to bring out the works from the respective epochs in their best light-yellow for collections from the early 1800s; turquoise to accentuate Impressionism art; and maroon to highlight the shape and expressions of plaster sculptures.

Automated blinds on unshuttered windows react according to daylight conditions outside so that the artwork is always seen in the best light.

The user-friendly museum app allowed me to find more detailed information about specific pieces simply by keying in their respective codes. As such, themed exhibitions that had hundreds of small items could display their treasures uncluttered by information labels.

Even my 170 kronor (\$26) lunch of tender pork belly and a juice turned cold as my gaze constantly strayed towards ordinary objects made extraordinary by beautiful design in the museum's packed restaurant: sleek modern lights hanging from the high vaulted ceilings, children's high chairs with groovy curved safety bars, a giant chandelier made of glass globes designed by 10 Nordic designers, as well as paintings, photos and por-



OFFBEAT STREET ART

In stark contrast to this sophisticated project is the raw energy of the restaurant and nothing looked out of place. My friend Aimee, who has lived in the city for the past 19 years, offered to drive me there as she had never explored the place. Otherwise, Snosatra is a 1.2km walk from Ragsved metro station. When we reached the construction yard, we stood in awed silence at the artistic spread before us.

Two walls of vibrant graffiti art stretched out for about a kilometre on either side of the near-empty street, with only a few other cars and visitors like us.

These were not amateur neighbourhood scrawls, but high-quality works ranging from irreverent satirical statements to hyper-realistic balloons that made us go up close to see if they were photographs (we

later discovered that this was the signature style of Swedish mural artist Daniel Fahlstrom, better known by his street name Huga).

Since 2016, about 150 Swedish and international artists would descend on this spot every May to paint over the current drawings and replace them with new art. There is also an open wall where anyone is welcomed to paint as long as they are respectful of the other pieces already there.

UNDERGROUND ART EXHIBITION

Stockholm's Tunnelbana (T-bana) subway system is often described as the world's longest art exhibition, with 90 out of 100 stations on the 110km network decorated with art and installations that often reflect the station's location or history.

I signed up for a tour of the subway by Stockholm Free Tour (www.stockholmfreetour.com, free and available from Fridays to Sundays), and it was an intriguing experience of how art can enliven and educate.

On the platform of Stadion, one of the first stations to open in the 1950s, a rainbow mural against blue

The national centre of architecture and design, ArkDes (above), explores the evolution of Swedish architecture and city development and the importance of design in everyday life.



A vintage clothing store (above) in Sofo. PHOTOS: GRACE MA

rock walls served as a cheery encouragement to wary first-time commuters then that the station was safe for use.

Olympic posters and signs near the exit referenced the nearby Stockholm Olympic Stadium (Sweden hosted the 1912 Olympics). Blue silhouettes at the busy T-Centralen interchange served as a reminder of the workers who toiled to build the station, while Kungsträdgården (which means The King's Garden in Swedish) is a mini replica of the former Makalos Palace gardens located directly above and is decorated with arte-

facts as old as 250 years that were excavated from various buildings around the city.

DAPPER DESIGN EVERYWHERE

Wherever I went during my week-long visit in November, I found inspiration as I explored the city's streets. There were buildings with cheeky graffiti art at the sides and even a playground where children merrily climbed fruit-shaped slides and structures.

On the only sunny day of my trip (yes, November can be mostly dreary), Aimee and I had brunch at Oaxen Slip ([oaxen.com/en/bistro-](http://oaxen.com/en/bistro-slip)



Inspiring design is found everywhere in Stockholm, even in playgrounds (above).



Professionally painted graffiti art at the Snosatra Graffiti Wall of Fame (left), located in an industrial park in southern Stockholm.



Art meets nature at Artipelag (left), a venue for art, design, culture and good food on Varmdo island.

slip), a bistro which was converted from an old slip house shed located in a restored shipyard by the Beckholmen waterfront, a small island in central Stockholm.

We shared Nordic plates such as pickled herring (a traditional Swedish festive favourite), smoked rainbow trout and a grilled banana cake with coconut ice cream and lemon while soaking in the industrial-maritime atmosphere.

Wooden boats, some more than a century old, hung from the 10m-high ceiling against a backdrop of sheet metal walls.

Design, lifestyle and food often

came together in one space, such as the new botanical-themed It's Pleat cafe (www.pleat.com) above the flagship H&M store in Stockholm city centre, where you can do a post-shopping refuel of salads, sandwiches and cakes amid greenery, and hole-in-the-wall Snickerbarken 7 (www.visitstockholm.com/eat-drink/cafes/snickarbacken-7), where art can be contemplated over a flat white.

The Sofo neighbourhood (sofo-stockholm.se), so-called for its location at the south of Folkungagatan, was a fun trove of cool and creative shops for everything I didn't know I

wanted – from fashion and jewellery to housewares and vintage knick-knacks.

I almost picked up an oh-so-soft pair of yellow elk-leather gloves from quirky lifestyle store Grandpa (www.grandpastore.com) and eventually succumbed to a 99-kronor tube of hand cream at Swedish organic skincare brand Lila Bruket's store, after being captivated by its unusual undulating wall surfaces and black-and-white minimalist packaging.

Erika Petersdotter's (www.erika-petersdotter.se) studio-shop was another design haven, with her simple

but charming pottery pieces. You can watch her at work and also take classes (1,295 kronor for a five-hour class).

I bought several bowls as souvenirs and they are now often used on the dining table – happy mementos of my wonderful design-soaked sojourn in Stockholm.

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GETTING THERE

Finnair flies one of the shortest flight routes to Stockholm (15 hours and 10 minutes), with a stopover of about two hours in Helsinki on the latest A350 fleet, which has the widest economy seats of any jetliner in its category.

If you are on an Economy Comfort package, kick-start your Nordic design journey with the signature bright prints of Finnish label Marimekko on your blanket, pillow and personal amenity kit.

From Stockholm's Arlanda Airport, take the 20-minute Arlanda Express to Stockholm Central Station in the city centre.

TIPS

- Take credit cards along. Cashless is the way to go in Stockholm and the only mode of payment accepted in some places.
- The Stockholm Pass gives you entry to more than 60 attractions, museums and tours as well as unlimited free travel on Hop On-Hop Off buses and boats. Prices start at 645 kronor (\$99) for a one-day adult pass.
- The Stockholm Travelcard gives you unlimited usage on all transport networks, including train, tram and buses within the pass duration. Prices start at 125 kronor for a 24-hour adult Travelcard.
- For information on the Stockholm Pass and Travelcard, go to www.stockholmpass.com

STAY

Hotel Skeppsholmen

Located on the island of Skeppsholmen, the former barracks of Sweden's Royal Marines is an ode to history and art with well-preserved original staircases and flooring and modern art installations that surprise at every turn.

The 77 rooms housed in two long 17th-century buildings were designed after a unique "fog" theme with soft palettes.

The Moderna Museet and ArkDes museums are a five-minute walk away, while the bus takes you to the doorstep of the Nationalmuseum in two stops. Stroll back to the hotel via the connecting bridge – the beautiful harbour views are worth it. Go to www.designhotels.com/hotel-skeppsholmen

Hotel at Six

Transformed from a bank building at Brunkebergstorg Square, the hotel is just metres away from T-Centralen metro station and the bustling Stockholm shopping belt.

The Brutalist facade of the 1970s building may seem imposing, but it is all classy-urban inside with polished granite, blackened steel and natural textures. Walls and spaces are decorated with art pieces, including a 2.5m-high giant female head in white Almeria marble at the main lobby stair, while the 343 rooms eschew the typical Scandi minimalist aesthetic for brooding monochromatic tones playing off brass accents and soft fabrics. Go to hotelatsix.com

MUST-VISIT ART AND DESIGN SPOTS

Moderna Museet

The exhibitions here, one of Europe's leading museums of modern and contemporary art, include works by reputed artists such as Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol and leading contemporary artists, both Swedish and international. Go to www.modernamuseet.se

ArkDes

At Sweden's national centre for architecture and design, find out how Swedish architecture and cities have developed over the last millennium and the importance of design in daily living that goes beyond practical considerations. Go to arkdes.se/en

Fotografiska

Opened in 2010, this is not only an exhibition centre for the works of renowned and emerging photographers tackling a broad range of subjects from social to commercial, but also a popular chill-out place with breathtaking harbour views. Go to www.fotografiska.com

Artipelag

Art meets nature at this stunning cultural and events venue located on Varmdo island. It takes more than an hour to get here from the city centre, but the scenic walking trails are worth it, as are the thought-provoking exhibitions that explore the interconnecting relationships among art, fashion and society. Go to artipelag.se

chewonitcomics.blogspot.com

chew on
CIGARETTES

Question: Can you tell which one is a smoker?

Here's a hint:

Singapore is prohibiting smoking in more public areas

Deadly second-hand smoke

No problem — I'll just light up at home.

Answer: This one

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BABY BLUES™

BY RICK KIRKMAN & JERRY SCOTT

IT WOULD BE EASIER TO CLEAN UP YOUR ROOM IF YOU DIDN'T LET IT GET THIS MESSY.

IF YOU'D RINSE YOUR BOWL AS SOON AS YOU FINISH EATING, IT WOULDN'T BE SO HARD TO WASH.

DON'T LEAVE CRAYONS ON THE FLOOR SOMEONE MIGHT STEP ON THEM.

IF YOU'D HANG UP YOUR CLOTHES, THEY WOULDN'T GET SO WRINKLED.

MY LIFE IS JUST A LECTURE SERIES WITH MEAL BREAKS.

PEANUTS

featuring "Good ol' Charlie Brown"

by SCHULZ

SOMETIMES I THINK NO ONE IS EVER GOING TO LOVE ME.

SOMETIMES I THINK NO ONE IS EVER GOING TO WANT TO LEAN OVER AND KISS ME...

NO ONE LOVES ME.

LOOK OVER HERE, SWEETIE.

NO ONE EVEN LIKES ME...

LOOK AT ME, SWEETIE. I'M LEANING OVER... HURRY UP, AND LOOK!

NO ONE CARES ABOUT ME.

I CAN'T STAND THIS WAY FOREVER SWEETIE... LOOK AT ME!

NO ONE LOVES ME...

I'M FALLING! KISS ME! HURRY UP! I'M HERE! I'M FALLING! I'M FALLING!

NO ONE CARES...

KLUNK!

I DON'T THINK ANYONE IS EVER GOING TO LOVE ME...

YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT, SWEETIE!

SHERMAN'S LAGOON

BY JIM TOOMEY

LOOKS LIKE SOMEBODY'S GOING FOR A SWIM.

I'M GOING TO PINCH HIM. COME TO PAPA.

AND I'M GOING TO STING HIM.

THEN I'LL STAB HIM.

WHOA! WHOA! WHOA! NOBODY'S DOING ANYTHING!

JUST LET HIM ENJOY AN INSPIRATIONAL SWIM IN THE OCEAN AND BE ONE WITH NATURE.

HE'S ALL YOURS.

ME FIRST.

garfield.com

Garfield

HOW DO THOSE DEAD FLIES GET INSIDE LIGHT FIXTURES?

OH-OH, JON'S WONDERING THINGS AGAIN.

DOES IT REALLY HELP TO PRESS HARDER ON THE REMOTE CONTROL BUTTONS WHEN THE BATTERIES ARE GETTING LOW?

COULD WE TALK FASTER IF WE HAD THREE LIPS? WHAT DOES THE INSIDE OF YOUR NOSE SMELL LIKE? WOULD MILK TASTE DIFFERENT IF COWS ATE HAMBURGERS?

ARRRGHHH

HOW DO THOSE DEAD FLIES GET INSIDE LIGHT FIXTURES?

BREWSTER ROCKIT: SPACE GUY!

BY TIM RICKARD

NASA'S INSIGHT LANDER TOUCHED DOWN ON MARS. IT HAS STATE-OF-THE-ART SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT FOR EXPLORING THE PLANET.

IT WILL SEND HIGH-RES IMAGES OF THE MARTIAN SURFACE!

IT CAN EVEN USE SNAPCHAT FILTERS.

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Sudoku Pacific

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| | | | 1 | 3 | | 4 | 2 | |
| | 1 | | | | 6 | | | |
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| 9 | | | | | | | 8 | |
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| | 8 | | | | 9 | | | |
| 2 | 1 | | 3 | 9 | | | | |

1/13

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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| 3 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 7 |
| 2 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 9 |
| 4 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 2 |
| 8 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 1 |
| 9 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 6 |
| 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 9 | 8 |

CHINESE NEW YEAR: TRADITIONS

Family traditions
with a personal
touch

Three families share with Jac Woo how they usher in Chinese New Year in their own special way

For some people, observing Chinese New Year traditions may seem like a list of dos and don'ts handed down by their grandparents.

But for others, some of these customs are meaningful activities that make them look forward to CNY — with the inclusion of other practices of their own.

Three families share their take on the festivities:

Music to her ears

Executive secretary Peng Yen, 40, enjoys listening to traditional CNY songs in shopping malls. To her, the simple yet meaningful lyrics and musical instruments used in



Reunion dinner with immediate and extended family members in Alor Setar is an annual CNY tradition for Ms Yen (far right). PHOTO: PENG YEN

the older songs put her in the right mood to shop for her CNY clothes.

She says: "The thought of CNY approaching makes me very happy because I can look forward to meeting my family members whom I hardly meet."

Every year, the Singapore permanent resident celebrates CNY in her Malaysian hometown with her 42-year-old Singaporean husband and four children aged six to 13.

She says: "My family members are spread across Malaysia and Singapore, so CNY is the biggest opportunity for everyone to travel back to Alor Setar, Kedah, where our family 'HQ' is, to celebrate together.

"On CNY Eve, we will have a home-cooked steamboat dinner at home or in a restaurant, where more than 30 of us will catch up with one another excitedly. We will then stay up past midnight to celebrate the first moment of the new year."

Making noise as the clock strikes midnight is believed to ward off bad spirits. The sounds of firecrackers and fireworks at that hour are like music to Ms Yen's ears.

"They really make the whole CNY atmosphere more vibrant," she says.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16



PHOTO: ISTOCK DESIGN: HSU LI



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Auspicious Reunion Takeaway Bundle (pictured left) from \$368.80

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EXCEPT DAY 1

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over 120 restaurants across 30 major cities





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The Perfect Reunion. Always at Concorde.

| Chinese New Year Buffets | Lunch | Dinner At Spices Cafe | Dinner At Concorde Ballroom |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 04 February 2019 | À la Carte Menu only | Adult \$96++ / Child \$40++ | Adult \$70++ / Child \$30++ |
| 05 to 06 February 2019 | Adult \$56++ / Child \$28++ | Adult \$72++ / Child \$34++ | |

Early bird enjoy 18% discount off when bookings are made and paid on or before Sunday, 20 January 2019. Deposits paid are non-refundable.

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SINGAPORE

Dine Exquisite

Welcome a prosperous beginning to the Lunar New Year at Yan Ting, the Cantonese dining establishment of The St. Regis Singapore. From hearty reunion feasts to exquisitely handcrafted takeaway delights, commemorate a year of abundance with a host of extraordinary culinary indulgences.

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For reservations and enquiries, please visit yantingrestaurant.com, call +65 6506 6852 or +65 9488 2741, or email yanting@stregis.com.

CHINESE NEW YEAR: TRADITIONS



Shopping treats

Chinese New Year is the time for retail therapy with these unbeatable deals



Soak up VivoCity's vibrance

Make a beeline for VivoCity's annual TANGS Fair at the Central Court, Level 1, from Jan 15 to Feb 3. This Chinese New Year, check out 56 local and international vendors, from homegrown food manufacturer Hock Wong and handmade cookie specialist J'Mom, to the famous Jenny Bakery from Hong Kong and SunnyHills from Taiwan.

Grab these offers and more:
■ J'Mom: Assorted cookie flavours (usual price: \$18.90 to \$20.90) at 10 per cent off with purchase of any three bottles; buy five bottles to get one free
■ Hock Wong: Bak kwa at \$49 to \$72 per kg (usual price: \$55 to \$80 per kg)
■ New Moon: Receive a Lock & Lock Shaker Bottle worth \$11.90 with a minimum purchase of \$88 in a single receipt; receive a WMF four-piece cutlery set worth \$49.90 with a minimum purchase of \$128 in a single receipt; receive an exclusive New Moon Pillow with a minimum purchase of \$188 in a single receipt. TANGS Member exclusive: maximum of two sets per customer per receipt.

Dining haven
Feast at VivoCity's many restaurants that are great for casual get-togethers, lohei selections and reunion dinners.
Perfect for families, Crystal Jade Dining IN (#01-112) offers CNY set menus for four people from \$388, with Jadeite members entitled to up to \$240 Crystal Jade cash dining vouchers (till Feb 19).
Want to try something new? Try the Thai Yusheng at Thai Accent (#02-145), Dancing Yusheng at Dancing Crab (#03-10) or the Fatt Parma Ham Yusheng at Shin Kushiya (#02-120).

Other delicious deals:
■ Soup Restaurant (#02-141): Till Feb 19, quote <SOUPCNY2019> to receive \$10 off the Reunion Take Away Set menu
■ Beauty In The Pot (#03-08A): From Jan 19 to Feb 19, enjoy 10 per cent off festive takeaways for Citibank, Standard Chartered and Paradise Gourmet Rewards card members
■ HaiDiLao HotPot (#03-09): Exclusively at VivoCity till Feb 4, receive a free HaiDiLao Yusheng with a minimum spend of \$300



Handmade cookies from J'Mom.



Mall happenings
Mark your calendar for a host of activities, gift redemptions and events at VivoCity.

Check out energetic gongfu displays (Jan 13, 19 and 20, at 4pm and 7pm) and Japanese Taiko drum performances (Jan 26 and 27, Feb 2 and 3, at 4pm and 7pm) at The Plaza, Level 1. Auspicious mascots such as the God of Fortune and Fu Lu Shou will also make appearances during selected weekends at 4pm and 7pm. On Feb 8 at noon and on Feb 9 at 4pm, an award-winning lion dance troupe will be performing thrilling stunts.

At the library@harbourfront on Level 3, make festive prints at the Lobby on Jan 30 at noon (no art experience or registration needed). Visit nlb.gov.sg/golibrary to register for other events.

Redeem these gifts (till Feb 4):
■ Spend a minimum of \$80 and receive a pack of exclusive red packets (maximum of two combined same-day receipts, limited to the first 250 shoppers daily on weekdays and the first 500 shoppers daily on weekends)
■ Spend a minimum of \$200 to redeem a Lohei Chopsticks gift set (maximum of three same-day combined receipts, limited to the first 120 shoppers daily on weekdays and the first 250 shoppers daily on weekends)

Clockwise from left: Feel the beat of Japanese Taiko drums. Check out energetic gongfu displays. Delights at Beauty In The Pot.
PHOTOS: VIVOCITY, TANGS, BEAUTY IN THE POT, J'MOM



Redeem exclusive red packets and a Lohei Chopsticks gift set.



PHOTO: MARINA BAY SANDS SINGAPORE

Entertainment galore at Marina Bay Sands Singapore

From Jan 31 to Feb 10, Sands Rewards LifeStyle (SRL) members can earn 10 per cent instant Reward Dollars on dining, plus get Double Rewards (6 per cent) with a minimum spend of \$3,000 at over 200 Sands Rewards outlets. ICBC cardholders can also enjoy free attraction tickets and instant membership upgrade.

Great shows to check out include Matilda The Musical, based on Roald Dahl's much-loved children's novel. Or opt

to broaden your mind at the ArtScience Museum, where ongoing exhibitions include Future World, All Possible Paths: Richard Feynman's Curious Life, and Minimalism: Space, Light, Object. Then dine at one of Marina Bay Sands Singapore's signature restaurants, many of which are offering CNY festive menus, including RISE Restaurant, db Bistro & Oyster Bar and festive confections at SweetSpot.
Visit www.MarinaBaySands.com/LunarNewYear for more information.



PHOTO: IROBOT

Home helpers from John Ackerman

From Jan 14 to Feb 2, John Ackerman is having a special promotion on the Roomba 690 (now \$638, usual price: \$790). The vacuuming robot seamlessly connects to Wi-Fi so users can remotely clean their home via the iRobot HOME App. Visit www.irobot.com.sg for details.

Terms and conditions apply for all. Please check with respective vendors and stores for more information.

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COME ALIVE

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ENJOY UP TO 10% INSTANT REWARDS
31 JAN - 10 FEB

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SHOPPING | DINING | THEATRE | MUSEUM | HOTEL

Terms and Conditions apply.

Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 15 (HD) (Variety)
7.00 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)
8.00 Talking Point 2018 (HD) (Current Affairs)
8.30 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
9.30 Secret Meat Business (Info-Ed)
10.00 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
11.00 Young Euro Classic 2016 – The Bayreuth Of The Younger Generation (Culture)
PM
12.20 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (Variety)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (HD) (Info-Ed)
1.00 So You Think You Can Dance 13 (HD) (Variety)
2.50 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (Variety)
3.00 World's Best Beaches (Variety)
4.00 Buzzing Hawks (Variety)
5.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (Variety)
5.30 Films & Stars (PG) (Variety)
6.00 Just For Laughs Gags 18 (HD) (Variety)
6.20 Cine On 5: Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials (PG) (CC) (Movie)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 Micro Monsters (PG) (CC) (Info-Ed)
10.30 Lip Sync Battle 4 (PG) (Variety)
11.00 Fear Factor MTV USA (PG) (Variety)
AM
12.00 The Dr Oz Show 9 (HD) (PG13) (Info-Ed)
12.50 Plastic Surgery Is My Business (PG) (Info-Ed)
1.20 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
2.20 Young Euro Classic 2016 – The Bayreuth Of The Younger Generation (Culture)
3.40 Lip Sync Battle 4 (PG) (Variety)
4.10 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (Variety)
4.20 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Food Source 3 (HD) (Variety)
7.00 Portrait Of Home (Drama)
9.00 Happy Friends (Schoolkids)
9.30 New Doraemon (Schoolkids)
10.00 Little Incredible Explorer (Children)
10.30 Mark Your Calendar (Children) (Debut)
11.00 Tuesday Report – Ninety Years Young (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 One Hundred Tastes Of Taiwan 2 (HD) (Info-Ed)

PM
12.00 The Quarters (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 City Foragers (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.30 Say It! (Variety)
3.30 Home Dining (CC) (Variety)
4.30 Beyond Words (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.30 Singapore Today (HD) (News)
7.00 Spring Flower (PG) (CC) (Drama)
9.00 Foodie Sunday (CC) (V)
10.00 News Tonight (HD) (News)
10.30 Discover 30 Degrees North Latitude (CC) (Variety)
11.30 Frontline (Current Affairs)
AM
12.00 The Legend Of S (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 Unriddle 2 (PG) (Drama)
4.00 The Deer And The Cauldron (HD) (PG) (Drama)

CHANNEL U

AM
8.00 Home Shopping (Infomercial)
10.00 Come Sing With Me 2 (Variety)
PM
12.00 Big Big World 2 (Info-Ed)
12.30 Food Secrets (CC) (Info-Ed)
1.30 Hey DJ (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Schools Unlimited (CC) (Info-Ed)
3.00 Golden Rainbow (PG) (CC) (Drama)
5.00 Lady With Class (PG) (CC) (Drama)
7.00 Shake It Up (Variety) (Finale)
9.00 Jealousy Incarnate (PG) (CC) (D) (Finale)
11.00 News Tonight (News)
11.30 Shake It Up (Variety) (Finale)
AM
1.30 Lord Of Shanghai (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.30 Close

CHANNEL NEWSASIA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.00 News Now
7.30 In Search Of Umami
8.00 News Now
8.30 Edible Wild
9.00 News Now
9.30 Made In Singapore
10.02 Conversation With
10.30 Super Octogenarians
11.00 News Now
11.30 Correspondents' Diary
PM
12.00 News Now
12.30 In Search Of Umami
1.02 Japan Hour (English Subtitles)
2.00 News Now
2.30 Money Mind
3.00 News Now
3.30 Asia Business First Weekend
4.02 Conversation With

4.30 Super Octogenarians
5.00 News Now
5.30 In Search Of Umami
6.00 News Now
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.02 Asia Business First Weekend
7.30 Welcome 2 Taiwan: Taiwan Holiday (English Subtitles)
8.00 Primetime Asia
8.30 In Search Of Umami (CC)
9.02 Law Of The Land (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight
10.30 On The Red Dot – Old Enough! (CC)
11.02 Enemy Within
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Welcome 2 Taiwan: Taiwan Holiday (English Subtitles)
1.02 In Search Of Umami
1.30 On The Red Dot – Old Enough!
2.00 News Now
2.30 Money Mind
3.02 Conversation With
3.30 Super Octogenarians
4.30 Asia Business First Weekend
5.02 Law Of The Land
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
1.00 Indian Panorama: U Turn (PG) (Kannada)
4.00 Vasantham Box Office: Anantha Kaneer (PG) (CC)
7.00 Kollywood Music (Variety)
8.00 Vera Level (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Sa Re Ga Mae
9.30 Ha Ha Ha Sirippu
10.00 Cinema Express: Vikram Vedha (PG13) (Tamil)
AM
1.00 Tamil Seithi (R) (News)
1.30 Close

OKTO

AM
7.00 Tip The Mouse (Preschool)
8.00 Sesame Street (HD) (Preschool)
9.00 Robot Trains (HD) (Schoolkids)
9.30 Tobot (HD) (Schoolkids)
10.00 Future Card Buddyfight Ace (Schoolkids)
10.30 CardFight!! Vanguard (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.00 Lego Ninjago – Sons Of Garmadon (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.30 Sindbad & The 7 Galaxies (Schoolkids)
PM
12.00 Word Whiz Or Slime Pit (Schoolkids)
12.30 Don't Try This At Home (HD) (Schoolkids)

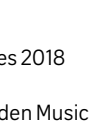
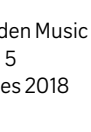
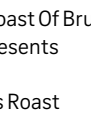
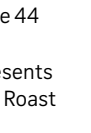
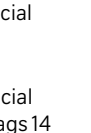
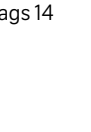
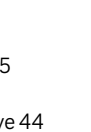
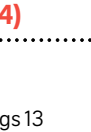
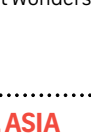
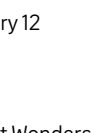
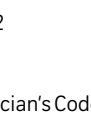
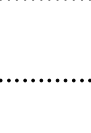
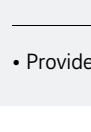
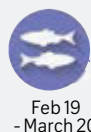
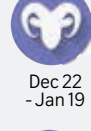
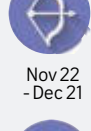
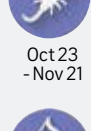
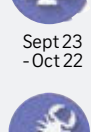
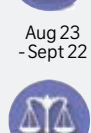
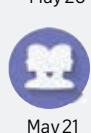
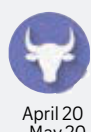
1.00 Blazing Team: Masters Of Yo Kwon Do (HD) (Schoolkids)
1.30 Nature Cat (HD) (Schoolkids)
2.00 Zorro The Chronicles (HD) (Schoolkids)
3.00 Future Card Buddyfight (Schoolkids)
3.30 CardFight! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (Preschool)
4.00 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (Schoolkids)
4.30 Blazing Team: Masters Of Yo Kwon Do (HD) (Schoolkids)
5.00 Nature Cat (HD) (Schoolkids)
5.30 Zorro The Chronicles (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.00 Totally Totto (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.30 Fableicious (HD) (PG) (Schoolkids)
7.00 The Deep (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
7.30 Future Card Buddyfight (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.00 CardFight! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.30 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
9.00 Sportsmax (HD) (CC) (Sports)
9.30 Perfection (CC) (Sports)
10.00 Max Muay Thai: Ultimate Muay Thai (HD) (PG13) (Sports) (Delayed)
PM
12.00 Close

SURIA

AM
10.00 Atuk PhD (Drama)
11.00 Ole Ole Temasya 2 (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 Balik Sekolah (HD) (Drama)
12.30 Suami Tanpa Cinta (HD) (Drama)
1.30 #Urbanista (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Isteri Tuan Ihsan (Drama)
3.00 Ceria Popstar (HD) (Variety)
4.00 Meh Sandar Pada Aku (HD) (PG) (Drama)
5.00 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.00 Tahu Nahu (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.30 Manja 3 (CC) (Info-Ed)
7.00 The Project (CC) (Info-Ed)
7.30 Romantika 8 (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Lagenda (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
9.30 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (Drama)
10.30 The Streets 2 (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.00 Bersamamu (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 Berita (HD) (R) (News)
AM
12.00 Close

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg.

Horoscopes



Heated up over hotpot

Foodies have leapt to defend the hotpot after food critic Chua Lam said it is lacking in culture and should disappear



Ho Ai Li

When Hong Kong food critic Chua Lam said hotpot is lacking in culture and should disappear, fans from Chengdu to Bugis rallied to its support.

On a talk show on China's Hunan TV recently, the Singapore-born Chua was asked which dish should disappear. Hotpot, said the 77-year-old. "Because it is the cooking method that is the least cultured. You just throw whatever has been cut into it, what is so tasty about it?"

His comments got him in hot water with many foodies, especially those in Chengdu, Sichuan, which is famous for its mala (numbingly spicy) hotpot.

Going by his logic, sashimi would also be culturally insignificant since it seems to require just the slicing of fish, some say pointedly.

In Singapore, an online poll of about 830 netizens by the Red Ants news website found that 71 per cent were for hotpot, with only 29 per cent supporting the food critic.

One Red Ants reader agreed with Chua, noting that culinary skills are not needed and instant broths can be bought.

Others criticised Chua, though,



Restaurant operators and the media note that gathering round a hotpot is a popular way to socialise among the Chinese.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Chung Lap Fai, masterchef at Hua Ting, disagrees that hotpot is lacking in culture.

"The gongfu is in the broth," says the 55-year-old, who moved here from Hong Kong in 1991.

The superior fish soup with winter melon and conpoy offered at Hua Ting Steamboat, for instance, needs up to six hours of preparation. The fish is pan-fried until it is golden brown before it is put into the soup to minimise its fishy smell.

Chef Chung says that besides the broth, the condiments for dipping and freshness of the ingredients also matter.

On the Hunan TV show, Chua had added that if the hotpot trend continues, chefs would be out of jobs.

Chef Chung concedes that hotpot restaurants require less manpower than restaurants where the dishes have to be cooked by chefs.

This was one reason Ms Hu Shujuan, owner of the Shi Li Fang Taiwanese hotpot chain, decided to start a hotpot business here despite previously specialising in porridge in China under the Hong Zhuangyuan brand, reported Singapore Eye website, which runs articles on topics of interest to Chinese immigrants here.

Shi Li Fang, which opened its first store in 2014, is the fastest growing hotpot chain here with its pocket-friendly offerings. It is slated to open its 13th store here after Chinese New Year, Shi Li Fang general manager Liu Gaoyang, 32, tells The Sunday Times.

"The locals like hotpot more (than porridge). They like to sit around a stove, where it is like a reunion."

He disagrees that hotpot lacks culture and notes that it has a long history.

He adds: "Hotpots are good for gatherings. People can go out and enjoy a different experience and environment."

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Top Five

Hotpots in Singapore



Wong Ah Yoke
Food Critic

Many Chinese around the world love hotpots, but few go as crazy about cooking in bubbling pots of broth as Singaporeans.

We can have hotpot, or steamboat as we prefer to call it, at most times of the day – for lunch, dinner and supper. And many do not think twice about sweating over the pots outdoors next to busy roads in sweltering tropical heat.

I remember a trip to Hong Kong

where I asked my hotel concierge to recommend a hotpot restaurant for lunch and her response was that I must have been mad.

With slightly raised eyebrows, she replied: "Hotpot restaurants open only for dinner."

Well, in Singapore, they open day and night. And here are my five favourite steamboat places.

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PHOTOS: BEAUTY IN THE POT
CHERYL MILES, INTERCONTINENTAL SINGAPORE, ST FILE



1

MAN FU YUAN
Level 2 InterContinental Singapore, 80 Middle Road, tel: 6825-1008; open: noon to 2.30pm, 6.30 to 10.30pm daily

The steamboat here is the restaurant's best-kept secret. It is also the best I've eaten.

It's not cheap though, at \$180 a person, for a minimum of four persons and up to six persons.

But before you complain about the price, take a look at the list of food items and you will find that it is not that bad after all.

There are live lobster, star garoupe, tiger prawn, crab claw, abalone, spiky sea cucumber, bird's nest, USDA Prime ribeye and kurobuta pork, among others.

My favourites are the hand-made balls – made with Angus beef, kurobuta pork and dace fish – as well as plump shrimp dumplings of a standard that only a top Cantonese restaurant like Man Fu Yuan can boast of.

The steamboat is not on the

restaurant's regular menus. But those in the know – that includes you now – call up three days in advance and turn up prepared for a feast.

A server is assigned to do the cooking for you because, with such precious ingredients, you do not want to run the risk of overcooking anything.

The meal starts with an empty pot and the server prepares the broth with chicken infused with rice wine and aged hua diao. Then, one by one, the ingredients are cooked for you at the table.

For the finale, rice is added to the remaining broth to make a delicious porridge. And you end up with an empty pot, which is how you start the meal.

Go hungry, because there's lots to eat.

2

IMPERIAL TREASURE STEAMBOAT RESTAURANT
04-12A Ion Orchard, 2 Orchard Turn, tel: 6636-9339; open: 11am to 3pm, 6 to 11pm daily

The restaurant moved a few doors from its old location in Ion Orchard last December, but the menu stays pretty much the same. It has another outlet at Great World City.

What is impressive here are the Cantonese broths, which include Healthy Chicken Soup, Traditional Pork Bone Soup and Century Egg & Parsley Soup. But the Szechuan Spicy Soup is designed for chilli cowards and too mild for me.

You get good quality live seafood such as prawns, clams and garoupe, but these will bump up your bill considerably. But the housemade meatballs, fishballs and yong tau foo items are very good too and these are not expensive.

A good idea is to order a set menu, which ranges from \$118 for two persons to \$278 for four persons and includes a selection of seafood, meat and vegetables. If you can't find your favourite ingredient in the list, just top it up with an extra a la carte order.

3

BEAUTY IN THE POT
Three outlets including 03-08A VivoCity, tel: 6255-0758; open: 11.30 to 6am daily (last order at 4.30am)

This hotpot chain by the Paradise Group opened its biggest outlet in VivoCity last December, adding to its earlier two restaurants in Kinex and Centrepoin malls.

The chain recently took its best-selling original Beauty Collagen Broth off the menu because of inconsistent supplies of shark's cartilage, a crucial ingredient in the recipe.

It has been replaced by a Beauty Collagen Broth brewed with dried scallops. It is delicious at the start, but the delicate seafood taste gets overpowered after you add other ingredients. I also miss the creaminess of the original broth. But the owners are working on improving it.

Other than that, the hotpot here is great. Check out the handmade balls and pastes, which taste fresh.

My must-have item is the fried beancurd skin. You dip the rolled-up, crispy beancurd into the broth for just three seconds. That way, it soaks up the flavour of the broth while still staying a little crisp.

You can eat here for less than \$50 a person, but be prepared to pay more for live seafood or premium beef.

4

BLACK KNIGHT WARRIOR
B1-01B Galleria Level, The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands, 10 Bayfront Avenue, tel: 6688-7138; open: 11.30am to 3pm, 5.30 to 10pm daily

This branch of a Taiwanese hotpot chain has stayed a bit under the radar since opening in mid-2017. That is a pity because the quality of its broths, meats and seafood is very good. The only setback is the price, as the bill can easily reach \$100 a person.

But if you do not mind paying for good food, you will be happy. My favourite Fish Maw Chicken Pot broth, for example, costs \$48, but it comes packed with fish maw and kampung chicken, so you can have a meal with just the broth.

What is weak here are the balls, which do not appear freshly made. The fried beancurd roll is not the best either.

Get those right and this may be the hotpot restaurant to beat in Singapore.

5

SPICE WORLD
01-06/07 Clarke Quay, Block B, 3 River Valley Road, tel: 6265-9777; open: 10.30 to 4am (Sundays to Thursdays), 10.30 to 6am (Fridays and Saturdays)

Better known for its teddy bear that melts into a spicy broth and Barbie dolls draped in slices of raw wagyu beef, this hotpot restaurant from China also offers very decent ingredients.

The chain says it does not serve frozen meat or seafood and the quality certainly lives up to the claim. In fact, the tiger prawns look like they are freshly fished out of the tank. And the wagyu beef is delicious.

I love the Prime Minister's Pork Balls, named for being a favourite of former British prime minister David Cameron. I can understand why he was so taken with them because the handmade balls taste fresh and flavourful.

Some of the cooked dishes, such as the Deep Fried Pork Slices, are good too.

Expect to pay from \$60 a person.

The year to pig out



Eunice Quek
Food Correspondent

Pig out this Chinese New Year as restaurants and bakeries go the whole hog to welcome the Year of the Pig. An abundance of pig parts are being used, from crispy pig's ears in yusheng to pig's stomach stuffed with goodies in nourishing soups; and all manner of pork knuckles – braised, fried and stewed. This is also the year of ultra-luxe yusheng, with pricey caviar and lobster tossed into the vat. They are also asking stratospheric three-figure prices that will break the piggy bank, all ending with the lucky number eight, naturally.

Adorable pig-shaped goodies are also hogging the limelight, from pineapple tarts to nian gao, and even an actual chocolate piggy bank.

The Sunday Times rounds up 20 places to hoof to.

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• Follow Eunice Quek on Twitter @STEuniceQ



Chef Janice Wong has created a Chocolate Piggy Bank (above) with three chocolate coins. PHOTO: JANICE WONG

Desserts

BAK KWAZZZ SOURDOUGH

What: While stocking up on groceries at Habitat by Honestbee, stop by Lazy Loaf bakery to pick up two breads with pork filling: Bak Kwazzz Sourdough (\$8.80) with bak kwa and lotus seed; and Golden Oink Oink (\$2.80) with Brazilian pork belly char siew.

Where: Lazy Loaf, Habitat by Honestbee, 34 Boon Leat Terrace
When: Tomorrow to Feb 19, 10am to 9:30pm daily, 10am to 5pm (Feb 4), closed Feb 5
Info: habitat.honestbee.sg

CHOCOLATE PIGGY BANK

What: This is one piggy bank you would not mind breaking. Chef-owner Janice Wong of the

eponymous brand has created a Chocolate Piggy Bank (\$33), complete with three chocolate coins, as part of her festive range.

Where: Janice Wong Singapore outlets at Paragon and Raffles City
When: Till Feb 19, 10am to 9pm daily (Paragon), 10am to 10pm daily (Raffles City). Both outlets: Feb 4, 10am to 6pm, closed on Feb 5
Info: Order online at: www.janicewong.online

BAKED GOLDEN PIG PINEAPPLE COOKIES

What: These pig-shaped pineapple tarts are worth the calories. They are priced at \$9 a pair (dine-in at Jade restaurant) and \$33 nett for a box of nine (takeaway only).

Where: The Fullerton Cake Boutique, The Fullerton Hotel Singapore, 1 Fullerton Square



When: Till Feb 19, 10am to 8pm daily
Info: Call 6877-8943 or e-mail fullertonshop@fullertonhotels.com. Order three days in advance, by Feb 16

Try pig-shaped pineapple tarts (above) from The Fullerton Hotel.

PHOTOS: FAT CHAP, COURTYARD BY MARriott, SINGAPORE NOVENA, PEONY JADE, SWISSOTEL MERCHANT COURT, PAN PACIFIC, SINGAPORE HOTEL, FORT CANNING, THE BUTCHERS KITCHEN, THE RITZ-CARLTON, MILLENIA SINGAPORE, SI CHUAN DOU HUA, JANICE WONG, THE FULLERTON HOTEL SINGAPORE, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL SINGAPORE

Yusheng



A WEALTH OF GREAT FORTUNE & SUCCESS YUSHENG

What: This epic yusheng from Peony Jade (\$588.88 nett, good for 18 people) comes in the shape of a pig, fashioned with white radish blanketed by many quilt pieces of hamachi (yellowtail) sashimi. Also included in the mix are lobster sashimi, salmon sashimi, Australian abalone, fish roe, seaweed and pomelo. When tossed up, the yusheng resembles a giant, decadent chirashi platter.

The restaurant also features a bounty of pig-themed items,

including roast Iberico pork belly with apple slaw (\$168.88 nett) and salted caramel chocolate pigs with bird's nest nian gao (\$128.88 nett).
Where: Peony Jade outlets at Keppel Club, Bukit Chermin Road; and Block 3A Clarke Quay, 02-02
When: Jan 21 to Feb 19, 11am to 2:30pm (weekdays), 10:30am to 3pm (weekends at Keppel Club); 11am to 3pm (weekends at Clarke Quay), 6 to 11pm daily
Info: Call 6338-0305 (Clarke Quay) or 6276-9138 (Keppel Club) or go to peonyjade.com. Order five days in advance



WEALTH FORTUNE YUSHENG

What: This pig-shaped yusheng is decked with gold and silver flakes, lobster, sliced abalone and French scallops. It is available for dine-in only, as part of the Heavenly Prosperity Set Menu (\$688.80 a person, minimum eight to dine, advance order required), or at \$288 as an à la carte item.

Where: Hai Tien Lo, Pan Pacific Singapore, 7 Raffles Boulevard
When: Jan 21 to Feb 19 (except Feb 4 dinner), 11:30am to 2:30pm, 6:30 to 10:30pm daily
Info: Call 6826-8240, e-mail dining.sin@panpacific.com or go to pacificmarketplace.sg. Order three days in advance



3 TREASURES PORKY YUSHENG

What: Roast pork belly, pork lard and char siew are the three stars in The Butcher's Kitchen's yusheng (\$38.80), lashed with a house-made plum sauce. The restaurant has also introduced char siew pasta with truffle, and mala pasta with roast pork belly at \$18.80 each.
Where: The Butcher's Kitchen, 02-472 Suntec City, North Wing, 3 Temasek Boulevard
When: Tuesday to Feb 19, 10am to 10pm daily. Closed from Feb 4 to 6
Info: Call 9616-0111 or go to www.thebutcherskitchen.sg. Order three days in advance for takeaway



PROSPERITY SMOKED KUROBUTA PORK YUSHENG

What: Toss up strips of smoked Kurobuta pork, smoked salmon, and a medley of vegetables, pomelo and crackers, for \$88 nett (good for 10 people, takeaway only).
Where: Ellenborough Market Cafe, Swissotel Merchant Court, 20 Merchant Road
When: Friday to Feb 19, 10am to 8pm daily
Info: Call 6239-1847/1848 or e-mail dining.ellenborough@swissotel.com. Order three days in advance, by 6pm on Feb 15



SIGNATURE GOLDEN FORTUNE SUCKLING PIG LO HEI

What: Three oinks to this yusheng, which features crispy roasted suckling pig skin, puffed pig skin, bak kwa flakes, blood orange segments and pickled ginger with red carrot, green carrot and white radish. The lo hei is topped with a sauce made with mandarin orange, plum sauce and honey. Add \$8 a person for this yusheng option at the semi-buffet or weekend à la carte buffet, with buffet prices starting from \$28 an adult.
Where: Sky22, Level 22 Courtyard by Marriott Singapore Novena, 99 Irrawaddy Road
When: Jan 22 to Feb 19, noon to 2:30pm, 6 to 10pm daily
Info: Call 6378-2040 or e-mail fhb.courtyardsg@marriott.com

EAR OF THE PIG YUSHENG

What: This porcine platter (above) features green and white daikon, freshly sliced golden snapper sashimi, pomegranate, pomelo and a side of curry-spiced crispy pig's ears. The yusheng starts at \$38.80 and is also part of a six-course menu (\$48++ a person, minimum four people to dine).
Where: Fat Chap, 01-643 Suntec City East Wing, 3 Temasek Boulevard
When: Jan 21 to Feb 19, 11am to 11pm (Mondays to Thursdays and Saturdays), 11 to 1am (Fridays and eves of public holidays), 11am to 4pm (Sundays)
Info: Call 6836-5994 or e-mail hello@fatchap.sg



SUCKLING PIG WITH BLACK CAVIAR AND JELLYFISH YUSHENG

What: Have a luxurious start to the year with Chinese executive chef Cheung Siu Kong of the one-Michelin-starred Summer Pavilion restaurant's Treasury menu (priced from \$4,708 for eight people, order one day in advance). It features porky highlights such as suckling pig with black caviar and jellyfish yusheng (available à la carte at \$138 or \$276), along with other dishes such as Iberico pork glutinous rice dumplings with cabbage in superior stock, and braised prickly sea cucumber stuffed with Iberico pork.

More modest set lunch and dinner menus are available, priced from \$108 a person.
Where: Summer Pavilion, The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore, 7 Raffles Avenue
When: Jan 21 to Feb 19, 11:30am to 2:30pm, 6:30 to 10:30pm; Feb 4, 11:30am to 2:30pm, 6 to 7:45pm, 8:30 to 10:15pm; Feb 5, 6, 9, 10, 16, and 17, 11:30am to 12:45pm, 1:15 to 2:30pm, 6:30 to 10:30pm
Info: Call 6434-5286, e-mail rc.sinr.summerpavilion@ritzcarlton.com or go to www.summerpavilion.com.sg

Special pork dishes

PORK PLATTER

What: LeVeL33's pork platter (\$68, good for two people) includes croquettes made with shredded braised pork cheeks, Iberico pork glazed with a char siew sauce made with house-brewed IPA (India Pale Ale), as well as mini pork rotisseries with pork crackling, lager pickled cucumber and salad.
Where: LeVeL33, Level 33 Marina Bay Financial Centre Tower 1, 8 Marina Boulevard,
When: Feb 1 to 8, from 6pm
Info: Call 6834-3133



DOUBLE-BOILED PIG TRIPE SOUP

What: Order this hearty soup (\$138, good for four to six people, dine-in and takeaway, above) where the pig tripe is filled with ingredients such as fish maw, dried scallop, sea whelk and kampung chicken. The soup is slow-cooked for four hours.
Chinese New Year set menus (from \$888 for 10 people) are also available.
Where: Si Chuan Dou Hua, Parkroyal on Kitchener Road, 181 Kitchener Road
When: Tomorrow to Feb 19, 10:30am to 2:30pm, 6:30 to 10:30pm daily
Info: Call 6428-3170

PROSPERITY DUO OF DEEP-FRIED PORK KNUCKLE AND SLOW-BAKED HONEY BUTTER RIBS
What: Have the best of both worlds with a duo of deep-fried pork knuckle and slow-baked honey butter ribs (\$147.65 nett, good for six people, available for takeaway only).

The pork knuckle is marinated with Sichuan peppercorns and salt, baked for four hours and deep-fried; while the ribs are slow-braised for 80 minutes with Taiwanese Kimlan Soy Paste, rock sugar, light and dark soy sauce, garlic and spring onions. Honey butter is spread on the ribs, which are then slow-baked for 30 minutes and served with chili sauce.
The pork duo is also part of a six-course takeaway menu



(\$532.85 nett for six people).
Where: Min Jiang, Goodwood Park Hotel, 22 Scotts Road
When: Friday to Feb 19, 11:30am to 2:30pm (Mondays to Saturdays), 11am to 2:30pm (Sundays), 6:30 to 10:30pm daily
Info: Call 6730-1704 (Min Jiang) or e-mail min.jiang@goodwoodpark hotel.com. Order five days in advance, by Feb 15, noon

ROAST SUCKLING PIG IN TWO STYLES

What: Peach Garden is offering suckling pig prepared two ways (\$328, pre-order required) – gold-dusted slices of roasted skin, and roast pork on pork floss and glutinous rice. It is also available as part of selected set menus.
Where: Selected Peach Garden outlets including Thomson Plaza, Chinatown Point, Orchard Country Club, Hotel Miramar and The Metropolis
When: Friday to Feb 19
Info: Go to www.peachgarden.com.sg for the full list of Chinese New Year menus and opening hours. Order three days in advance, by Feb 16

"PROSPERITY" BROTZEITPLATTE
What: Pig out on Brotzeit's pork platter (\$188, good for six to eight people), which includes roast pork belly with bread stuffing, its signature crispy pork knuckle, a duo of ribs marinated with Bavarian honey sauce and apple cider with chili flakes, as well as premium German sausages. The platter comes with side dishes of sweet potato fries, creamy Chinese cabbage and sautéed garlic mushrooms.
Where: All Brotzeit outlets including Westgate
313@Somerset and Raffles City
When: Thursday to Feb 19

Info: Order online at brotzeit.co or go to brotzeit.co for full menu list and opening hours

ROAST PORK BELLY ROULADE WITH MINCED SEAFOOD

What: Man Fu Yuan's new creation is a roast pork belly roulade (\$368 for 4kg) with perfectly crispy skin on the exterior and a minced seafood filling in the centre.
Where: Man Fu Yuan, Level 2 InterContinental Singapore, 80 Middle Road
When: Till Feb 3, 11:30am to 9pm daily (Man Fu Yuan Shoppe at the entrance of InterContinental Singapore); Feb 4, 9am to 3pm; Feb 5 to 19, 11am to 3pm, 5:30 to 9pm daily (Man Fu Yuan)
Info: Call 6825-1131, e-mail sinhb-festive@ihg.com, or order online at The Lobby Lounge InterContinental Shoppe.sg. Order three working days in advance

PERANAKAN FAVOURITES

What: Go Peranakan this Chinese New Year at The Lobby Lounge with quintessential favourites such as bakwan keeping (minced pork ball with crab meat in pork and chicken broth), and babi pongteh (Nonya-style braised pork). Other highlights include ayam buah keluak, itek sioh (braised duck with tamarind and coriander) and chap chye.
The dishes, by Peranakan establishment PeraMakan, are available on a rotating menu at the lunch buffet (till Feb 28, prices from \$38 an adult). From Feb 4 to 19, look forward to more festive treats including Prosperity Popiah and Fortune Kueh Pie Tee with Scallop and Crab.
Crispy roasted suckling pig is also

available on the buffet spread from Feb 4 to 6.
Where: The Lobby Lounge, Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore, Orange Grove Road
When: Till Feb 28, 11:30am to 2:30pm (weekdays), noon to 4pm (weekends and Feb 4 to 6), 11:30am to 4pm (Feb 7 to 19, weekdays)
Info: Call 6213-4398 or e-mail dining.sl@shangri-la.com

HARVEST PEN CAI

What: Ensure a bountiful harvest this year with Yan's Harvest Pen Cai (from \$190 for five people, available for dine-in or takeaway). The claypot dish includes pig trotter, roast pork and dried pig skin. Add on whole abalone from \$12 a piece.
Where: Yan, National Gallery Singapore, 1 St Andrew's Road
When: Friday to Feb 19, 11:30am to 2:30pm, 6 to 10:30pm daily; Feb 4 to 6, 5:30 to 7:45pm, 8:15 to 10:30pm
Info: Call 6384-5585 or e-mail reserve@yan.com.sg. Order two days in advance

GOLDEN PILLOW WHITE PEPPER PORK SPARE RIBS BUN

What: This "golden pillow" or house-made bun is filled with pork ribs slow-braised for one hour in white pepper and shitake mushroom sauce.
It is part of the Wealth menu (\$1,698 for a table of 10, dine-in only) at Song Garden Chinese Restaurant.
Where: Mercure Singapore Bugis, 122 Middle Road
When: Tuesday to Feb 19, 11:30am to 2:30pm (weekdays), 11am to 3pm (weekends and public holidays), 6 to 10pm daily
Info: Call 6521-9299 or e-mail song.garden@accor.com

The Lobby Lounge at Shangri-La is offering a rotating menu of Peranakan food for its lunch buffet.



Pearl barley makes a terrific congee with dried scallop and shredded chicken.
ST PHOTOS:
TAN HSUEH YUN

BARLEY CONGEE

INGREDIENTS

100g dried scallop
400g pearl barley (above)
2 skin-on, bone-in chicken thighs
1Tbs Shaoxing wine
1tsp light soya sauce or to taste
1 small onion or leek
4 to 5 sprigs of fresh coriander
2 to 3 scallions
2 litres chicken stock
2Tbs cooking oil
Shaoxing wine to taste
Salt and white pepper to taste

METHOD

1. The night before cooking, rinse the dried scallop under running water, place in a deep bowl, cover with tap water and soak overnight in the fridge. Drain and shred before cooking.
2. Pour barley into a colander, rinse under running water and let the grains drain while you prepare the other ingredients.
3. Marinate the chicken thighs for about 20 minutes with the Shaoxing wine and soya sauce. Steam over high heat for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the juices run clear when the meat is pierced with a sharp knife. Shred the meat, discard the bones and set aside. Reserve any liquid from steaming the chicken.
4. Chop the onion or leek, coriander and scallions.
5. Pour the stock and liquid from steaming the chicken into a pot, add the drained scallop and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer and keep it simmering while you cook the barley.
6. Heat the cooking oil in a large pot over medium heat. Sauté the onion or leek until the pieces turn translucent. Add the barley, stir until the grains are coated with oil.
7. Add the chicken stock and the scallop to the pot two ladlefuls at a time and allow the grains to absorb the stock before adding more. I tend to use up all the liquid because I prefer a softer congee, but stop adding stock when the barley reaches a consistency you like. All the scallop should go into the dish. Add Shaoxing wine to taste. Stir the shredded chicken through the congee, add salt and pepper to taste.
8. Ladle into bowls and serve immediately, topped with the chopped coriander and scallions.

Serves four to six

Hunger Management

Make congee with barley

The grain need not be limited to a sweet treat, but can be used in a savoury dish

Tan Hsueh Yun
Food Editor

While out and about recently, I bumped into a friend. Without understating anything, we have both gone through big changes in our lives. After exchanging pleasantries, she said, suddenly: “I don’t know what I am doing.” Being slow of wit that day, my response was wholly inadequate. It was only later that the flood of words came, things I should have said. I felt so much for her because I had been in that same terrible limbo. Wobble applies only to food, I firmly believe – say, panna cotta or custard. It has no place in other

parts of my life. The same applies to waffle. That should really just be something to order at brunch. However, I know what it is like to wobble and waffle, to be uncertain of life and fearful of change. What I have found, though, is that while life can be an unpredictable minefield, there is no need to fear taking a step and have something blow up in my face. These days, I rather enjoy the spectacle. It takes a conscious decision to flip a switch to let light in. Flipping switches is one thing, but the work of actually grappling with change and dealing with it gracefully is quite another. The process has been slow, but I keep plugging at it. Developing this ability is akin to building a body in the gym through multiple sets and endless repetitions. It is about pushing through muscle fatigue until, as my trainer posted on Facebook: “What seems impossible today will one day become your warm-up.” It helps to want to deal with change, I suppose. I don’t know what made me want to. Is it getting older? Conventional wisdom will have you believe that people become more set in their ways the older they get.

Calcification is not my thing though. I will fight it to my last breath. Is it because the comfortable box I was in became claustrophobic? Perhaps. Or maybe I was just sick of being a milquetoast. When illuminated, the dark corners and scary alleyways of life are much less intimidating. It becomes possible to re-evaluate things in new ways, to look at life differently. One of the benefits has been the spillover into the kitchen. You cannot cherry-pick the areas where you would accept change, of course. I have always looked at barley one sweet way. The grains come in handy in the hot months, when I boil them with water and candied melon to make a cloudy drink to beat the heat. In hawker centres, I love a dessert of lightly sweetened cold barley, ginkgo nuts and beancurd sheets, so soothing after a fish soup lunch. Dinner at a restaurant made me rethink the way I eat barley. I had ordered grilled fish and it came with a most delicious barley risotto, the grains cooked with stock the way arborio rice is, and perfumed with Shaoxing wine. Tender with a hint of chew, grains bursting with juice, the barley was much more com-

elling than the fish. So I got to cooking with pearl barley from the supermarket. I thought the grain would make a terrific congee with dried scallop and shredded chicken. I cook it like I would risotto, using one part barley to four or five parts liquid. Some people pour in the stock all at once and let the barley cook. I prefer adding a ladle or two at a time and stirring until I get the consistency I want. The juice from steaming the chicken, and as much Shaoxing wine as you dare, add depth to the dish. Minced pork, sliced fish, ginkgo nuts, fried peanuts, pork or chicken floss, whitebait, anchovies, canned abalone if money is no object – everything that people put in congee can go into this dish. A cook is limited only by his imagination. This is the sort of rib-sticking meal a person needs to face the future. The road ahead, for all of us, will no doubt be equal parts exciting, frustrating and rewarding. There will be a curve ball or 50. Bring it.

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Open For Business



TIM HO WAN
Tim Ho Wan Asia Pacific recently unveiled its ninth outlet in Singapore – at Great World City. Together with founding chefs Mak Kwai Pui and Leung Fai Keung, who led Tim Ho Wan to its first Michelin star, the team has refined and upgraded the culinary offerings and introduced a revamped menu. The upgraded classics include Baked BBQ Pork Buns (\$5.80++, above), which has been tweaked to replicate the same pork bun as the Tim Ho Wan in Hong Kong; BBQ Pork Rice Rolls (\$5.50++); Spinach Dumplings With Prawn (\$4.80++); and Prawn & Pork Dumplings (\$4.80++). Among the new items are Hong

Kong Braised Beef Soup Noodle (\$8.80++), where springy, thin noodles with beef meat and tendons braised for three hours are served in a bowl of warm broth; Pork Dumplings In Hot & Spicy Sauce (\$6++), minced pork filling in thin wonton skin tossed in Tim Ho Wan’s red-hot chilli oil and spicy sauce made from 18 herbs and spices; and Spicy Fried Rice (\$7.50++) with fresh egg, edamame and Chinese sausage. **Where:** 01-139 Great World City, 1 Kim Seng Promenade **Open:** 11am to 10pm (Mondays to Fridays), 9am to 10pm (Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays) **Info:** Call 6483-2000 or go to www.timhowan.com



TABLE65
Table65, a new dining concept by Resorts World Sentosa and helmed by renowned Dutch chef Richard van Oostenbrugge, is named after Singapore’s phone country code. Here, diners are seated at a Chef’s Table wrapped around the perimeter of the workspace. This allows them to get close to the action in the kitchen, watching chefs cook, plate, serve and explain each course. The menus reflect chef van Oostenbrugge’s contemporary European dishes with international influences including Japanese and Dutch. Menus are refreshed regularly. Diners can go for the eight-course Experiential Menu (\$218++), the five-course Discovery Menu (\$148++) or

the a la carte menu (\$29++ to \$89++). Vegetarian dishes are available. Signatures include cold smoked horse mackerel with passionfruit ceviche, coconut and combava, dill and calamansi emulsion (above); and the Os A Moelle, smoked herring bone, veal tartare with bone marrow, cockles and Beluga caviar. **Where:** Level 1 Hotel Michael, Resorts World Sentosa, 8 Sentosa Gateway **Open:** 6 to 10.30pm (Thursdays to Mondays); closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays except eves of and on public holidays **Info:** Call 6577-7939, e-mail table65@rwsentosa.com or go to www.rwsentosa.com/en/restaurants/table65

NAGANUMA ICE
Naganuma Ice, reputedly Hokkaido’s most popular and best-selling soft-serve brand, has opened its second outlet in Singapore – located within Don Don Donki’s new store at City Square Mall. The brand, founded in 1994, has three outlets each in Taiwan and Hokkaido, where its outlet in the small town of Naganuma is said to sell up to 3,500 soft-serve and gelato items in a day. At the new Singapore outlet, it has introduced new items such as Cream Puffs (\$3.90 to \$4.20), which come in three flavours – Aomori Apple, Fresh Strawberry and the classic Hokkaido Milk Custard. The puffs made of choux pastry are baked fresh daily, using ingredients imported from Japan, with custard and its signature 100 per cent Hokkaido raw milk as a base in all three flavours. Another new item is Chocolate Soft Serve (right), a popular choice among the young and old. Four soft serve, two split soft serve (\$6 a cup, add 50 cents for cone) and 12 gelato (\$5.50 to \$6.50 a cup) flavours – such as Yame Matcha, Fresh Milk and Yubari Melon – are available at the City Square Mall outlet. Flavours change every fortnight. And available only in Singapore is Creme Brulee Soft Serve (\$8). **Where:** Basement 2 City Square



PHOTOS: NAGANUMA ICE, RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA, TIM HO WAN

Mall (within Don Don Donki), 180 Kitchener Road **Open:** 11am to 10pm daily **Info:** www.facebook.com/naganumaiceco

• Opening a restaurant? Send the details to stlife@sph.com.sg



The Three-Tier Signature Lamb Platter (left) offers three cuts – belly, rack and “body”. For the broths (right), The House Original White Soup is best matched with the House Spicy Mala Soup.
ST PHOTOS: WONG AH YOKE



Restaurant Review

Game for mild lamb

The meat is a speciality at Little Sheep Hot Pot

Wong Ah Yoke
Food Critic

Despite the recent comments by Hong Kong-based food critic Chua Lam on hotpot being culturally insignificant, steamboat restaurants are thriving in Singapore.

The latest to open is the two-week-old Little Sheep Hot Pot in One Fullerton.

It is the first outlet here of a well-known chain from China which started in 1999 in Inner Mongolia and is better known by its Chinese name, Xiao Fei Yang.

The chain boasts more than 280 outlets in China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Japan, Canada and the United States.

In Singapore, it is a franchise operated by No Signboard Holdings.

Amid the crowded hotpot scene here, which ranges from eateries in Geylang and Chinatown that offer low-priced buffets to mid- to high-end brands such as Imperial Treasure, Little Sheep Hot Pot falls in the middle.

I would say its closest competitor is Hai Di Lao, another chain from China that is known for excellent service. In comparison, it is better in its soup stocks and you do not have to queue for hours or face sexist attitudes – I was refused a free manicure at the Hai Di Lao outlet in Clarke Quay because it was offered only to women.

But service falls a little short. It is not that the staff members do not try, but they sometimes come across as being too enthusiastic.



LITTLE SHEEP HOT POT

01-05 One Fullerton, 1 Fullerton Road, tel: 6222-9959; open: 11am to 11pm (weekdays), 11 to 2am (weekends)

Food: ★★☆☆

Service: ★★☆☆

Ambience: ★★☆☆

Price: Budget about \$60 a person, more for fresh seafood

For example, at my dinner last week, some of the waitresses added ingredients to the pot without first checking with us. It did not matter that we were taking a pause from eating.

There are a number of broths to choose from and the House Original White Soup (\$20), made from brewing different meats and herbs, is my pick. It is not very robust at the start, but is flavourful nonetheless. As you add meat and seafood to the pot, the flavours start developing very nicely.

You can also do a twin pot of two flavours and, for that, the House Spicy Mala Soup is the best match

for the white soup. The combination costs \$22. The spice level of the mala soup is tuned very low – for me, at least – but you can ask for it to be bumped up.

If you have not guessed from its name and its Mongolian origins, lamb is a speciality here.

The Singapore outlet uses New Zealand lamb with cuts such as Signature Lamb Rolls (\$9) and Lamb Rack And Flap (\$16). A Three-Tier Signature Lamb Platter (\$38) offers three cuts – belly, rack and what the server calls “body” that I interpret as loin.

The meat has a mild flavour and you cannot distinguish much differ-

ence among the paper-thin slices other than the belly being slightly fatter. Dipped into a sauce you blend yourself from a buffet of seasonings such as sesame sauce, soya sauce and chilli paste, it does not have the unpleasant gaminess that turns some people off from the meat. Instead, there is a mild lamb flavour.

Another ingredient I like is Beef Leaf Tripe (\$17). It is a little expensive, but the serving is big and the tripe is cut into just the right thickness so that after cooking for half a minute or so, the frilly strips have a crunchy texture. There is a cheaper option at \$7 called Fresh Beef Tripe,

but this comes in sheets and looks darker.

The other ingredients we order for the hotpot – such as Premium Wagyu Marbled Beef (\$29) and Bull Frog (\$15) – are the garden variety.

The restaurant also offers some cooked items and its Signature Lamb Kebab (\$8 a skewer) is a must-try. The small cubes of marinated meat are grilled, then sprinkled with a dry spice mix. They are tender, juicy and delicious. If you are in a group, get three skewers for \$20.

There are fresh-cut fruit such as honeydew and watermelon that you can help yourself to. Diners can also enjoy soft-serve vanilla ice cream in cones on the house.

The restaurant also scores for ambience. You can sit in air-conditioned comfort or outdoors on the Marina Bay waterfront. The decor is modern and tasteful with light-coloured wood panels and paintings of Mongolian horsemen on the walls. There are some semi-private alcoves as well as private rooms.

This is not the best hotpot in town, but for the price you pay, it is better than many.

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• Follow Wong Ah Yoke on Instagram @wongahyoke

• The Sunday Times paid for its meals at the eateries reviewed here.

Cheap & Good

Old-school cooking a winner



Hedy Khoo

If there is one lesson I learnt from eating the bee hoon at Gu Zao Wei You Tiao Economic Bee Hoon And Nasi Lemak, it is not to judge a dish by its number of ingredients.

True cookery gongfu is in how a chef, limited by cost and practical considerations, transforms humble ingredients into a dish that is a world of flavours.

That is exactly what chef Wendy Lau, 49, does with the bee hoon she fries at her sister's stall tucked in a corner of Bedok North Industrial Park E.

I make my way there because a friend, Sam, told me it was worth

the trip. He had waxed lyrical about the stall's fried chicken drumstick.

My order of bee hoon, a fried sunny-side-up egg, curry vegetables and a chicken drumstick comes with a generous amount of sambal chilli and two slices of Japanese cucumber. The plate, which can feed two, costs \$4.50.

The bee hoon looks plain, but after the first flavoursome mouthful, it takes sheer resolve to not shovel my way through the plate in the quickest time possible.

Madam Lau says she uses Thai fish sauce to season the bee hoon. The brown colour comes from dark soya sauce.

But the secret ingredient is garlic and shallot oil. Every other week, she fries a batch of 5kg of shallots and 17kg of garlic. Instead of buying ready-to-use peeled shallots and garlic from her supplier, she insists on buying them with skins on.

The oil, infused with the garlic and shallots, forms the backbone of



Gu Zao Wei's bee hoon, fried egg, curry vegetables and chicken drumstick are flavoursome.
ST PHOTO: HEDY KHOO

flavour for her bee hoon.

Instead of the overcooked fried eggs that one often finds at economic bee hoon or rice stalls, the stall serves a serious piece of sunshine that I find a luxury to eat.

Her sister, stall owner May Lau, 60, who admits to having a perfectionist streak, fries the sunny-side-ups in simmering oil, no more than five at a time.

The pretty cloud of egg white is tender and fluffy, and that yellow gooey yoliness that bursts forth at

the gentle prick of the fork is all that an egg lover can ask for.

The curry vegetables carry a spicy kick and have a pleasant tang from the use of tamarind.

When I arrive at the stall at 11.30am, the chicken drumstick I get is the last one available. A new batch is being fried while I am ordering, but I have no patience to wait.

To my surprise, the drumstick is still warm and crispy. There is so much flavour in the meat that I pick it up with my hands and tear away

at it caveman-style.

No detail is overlooked. Even the sambal chilli is made with Indonesian palm sugar as Madam Wendy Lau finds it more fragrant and healthier than white refined sugar.

She says: “We want to give our customers a taste of simple old-school food and help make them happy on a work day. It gives us a sense of fulfilment if they can taste the heart that goes into preparing their meals.”

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GU ZAO WEI YOU TIAO ECONOMIC BEE HOON AND NASI LEMAK

01-12, Block 3014 Bedok North Industrial Park E, tel: 9661-1446/8182-9799; open: 5.30am to 1.30pm, closed on Sundays and public holidays

Rating: ★★☆☆



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